VARIETY

BRETT GOLDSTEIN BLOWS UP

From 'Ted Lasso' to 'Shrinking,' the British breakout star is making up for lost time — and finally cracking a smile

By Michael Schneider

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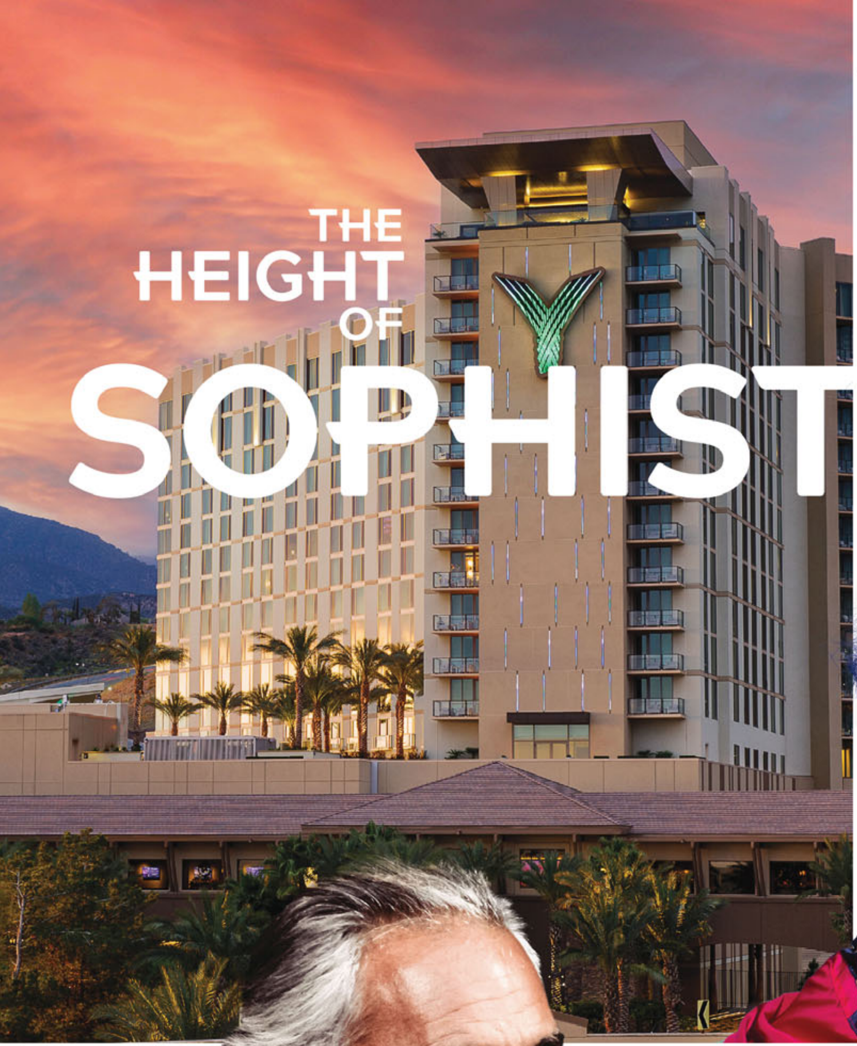

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Brett Goldstein isn't angry;
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Cover photograph by Peggy Sirota

(Cover and this page) Styling: Rose Forde/The Wall Group; Styling Assistant: Daniella Nikolic; Grooming: Kerrie Urban/The Wall Group; Production Design: Francisco Vargas; Suit and shoes: Christian Dior

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A Keen Eye on How We Watch

CO-EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Cynthia Littleton

Ramin Setoodeh

We have to credit our dynamic writers Selome Hailu and Jennifer Maas for enlivening this issue with an enterprise story that is long overdue. The pair cast a critical eye on the overall user experience in TV now that streaming has taken root. Hailu and Maas spent months taking the temperature of industry insiders about what they like and don't like about the user interfaces of major streaming services. After all, who would have better insight than those who craft the content that powers these streamers?

Surprisingly, it took a little prodding to get thoughtful responses from the creative community. "Several of the insiders we polled felt they didn't have enough expertise about interface design to comment — until we mentioned specific items like homepage categories and search functions," Hailu observes.

The inspiration for the story came in the most organic way — from two colleagues airing their grievances about the shortcomings of streaming platforms. That got Hailu and Maas thinking. "We became very curious about what industry execs, talent and creatives would say on this topic if they put on their consumer hats," Maas says. "Once we got comments like, 'They're all bad,' from a top producer, we knew we were onto something very fun."

Meanwhile, our cover story by Michael Schneider, *Variety*'s television editor, gives readers an in-depth look at Brett Goldstein, best known for playing the gruff soccer star Roy Kent on "Ted Lasso." The Emmy-winning actor (who co-created the Apple TV+ comedy "Shrinking") is a perfect example of what Hollywood is looking for in the era of streaming — a creative talent who can juggle roles both in front of and behind the camera.

Goldstein gave Schneider plenty of material to work with as they dined at a legendary industry eatery where they were interrupted only a few times by fans seeking selfies. The actor is candid, introspective about his life and career, and dishy about his youthful love of "Twin Peaks." And he is, as ever, Sexy Brett Goldstein — which goes without saying after this cover showcase.

Contributors

Variety TV editor **Michael Schneider** saves everything, including several old 1980s issues of Muppet Magazine, which he brought to his interview with Brett Goldstein — a Muppets superfan who squealed in delight.

TV business writer **Jennifer Maas** gets daily calls from streamers' news-spinning PR teams. She's eager to hear their takes on this week's feature detailing the industry's brutally honest opinions about the pros and (mostly) cons of the streamers' user interfaces.

Selome Hailu once thought she might grow up to be a graphic designer. She became a reporter instead, but enjoyed returning to her roots to write this week's story critiquing the designs of different streaming interfaces.

"Brett Goldstein — what an awesome guy!" enthuses **Peggy Sirota**, who photographed our cover subject in Los Angeles on March 25. "Funny, smart, humble and willing to do ... almost ... anything.😉"

Littleton: Photograph by Dan Doperalski; Setoodeh: Photograph by Alexi Lubomirski

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BIZ+BUZZ

Belle of the Box Office

After being counted out by studios, movie theaters are enjoying a big return

By Brent Lang and Rebecca Rubin

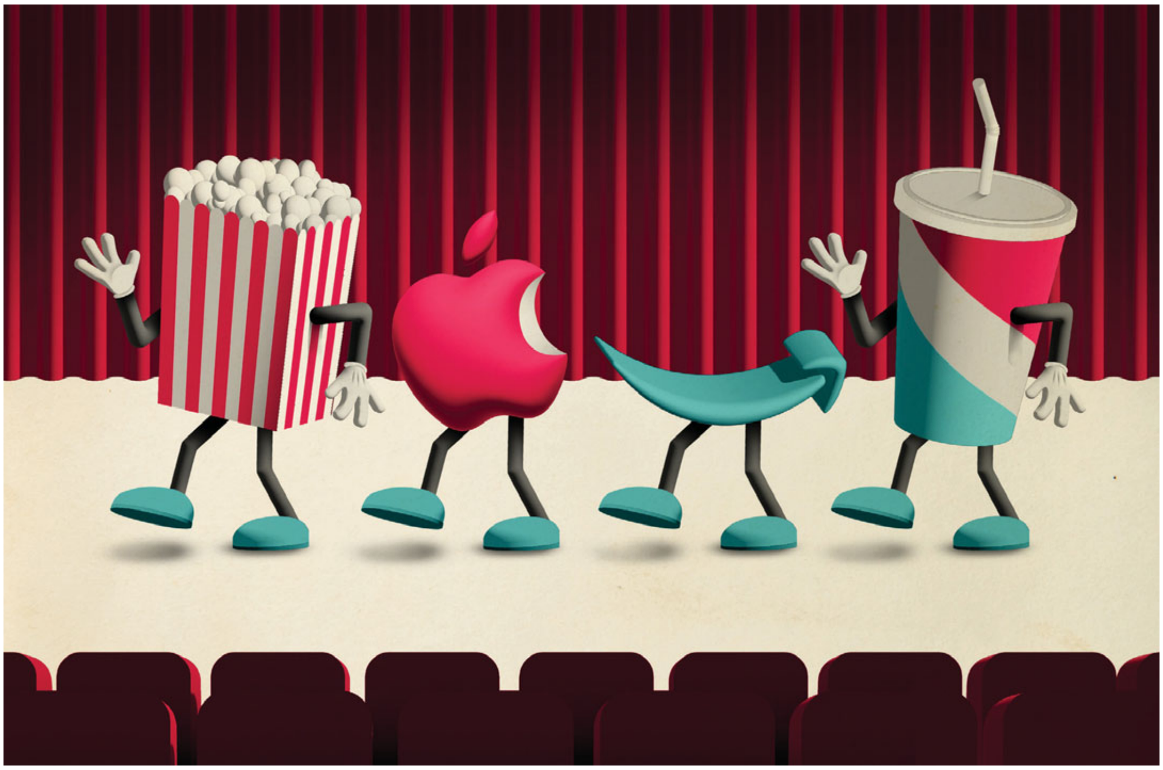

Illustration by Cheyne Gateley

Jeff Logan is feeling relieved.

For the first time since COVID shuttered movie theaters, business is booming, with audiences flocking to see "John Wick: Chapter 4," "Scream VI" and, just last weekend, "The Super Mario Bros. Movie." And Logan, who owns Logan Luxury Theatres in rural South Dakota, is back in the black after enduring two years where profits vanished while studios failed to furnish enough big movies to play.

"It's nice," he says. "We don't have to reassure our bankers every time we meet for coffee."

Logan's theaters aren't the only ones experiencing a dramatic change of fortunes. Overall, the domestic box office stands at $2.3 billion, up 34% from the same period last year and an astounding 576% improvement over 2021. The exhibition industry is finally looking like its pre-pandemic self again. That's partly attributable to studios releasing new installments of successful franchises, but it is also linked to a shift in attitude among the major media companies when assessing the value of a theatrical release.

In recent years, Hollywood had a serious case of Netflix envy, with studios opting to launch their own streaming services. To do that, they amassed a lot of red ink building splashy streaming shows and shrunk the amount of time that movies screened exclusively in cinemas as a way of generating enthusiasm for the likes of Disney+, Paramount+ and HBO Max. But lately, Wall Street has soured on the economics of streaming, believing that the media conglomerates that run these services need to be as focused on making money as they are on attracting subscribers. That's made box office revenues an increasingly vital part of their overall financial health.

"Studios have found religion," says Eric Handler, an analyst at Roth Capital Partners. "They've come to recognize that having an exclusive theatrical window is the best way to maximize profits instead of releasing everything simultaneously on demand. There's a lot of marketing value in having your movie in cinemas."

For now, Netflix is largely holding firm to its model of releasing nearly all its movies directly on its platform, with only a handful of awards contenders enjoying in-theater runs. But streaming companies like Amazon and Apple are moving in a different direction. Last weekend, even as "Mario" dominated the box office, Amazon scored a modest hit with "Air," a drama about Nike's courtship of Michael Jordan that stars Matt Damon and Ben Affleck. The film was released on more than 3,000 screens, the widest debut ever for a movie from a streaming service, and benefited from a $40 million marketing campaign. As "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" generated a massive $204 million in its first five days of domestic release, "Air" racked up north of $20 million — impressive for a movie aimed at adults.

"Amazon is taking a swing," says Kevin Wilson, MGM and Amazon Studios theatrical distribution executive. "But I don't think you can replace what 'Air' has gotten this weekend in terms of publicity, word-of-mouth and marketing from going to theaters."

Amazon gave "Air" the widest-ever theatrical debut for one of its movies.

Ana Carballosa/Prime

> “Studios have found religion. There's a lot of marketing value in having your movie in cinemas."
> —Eric Handler, analyst

Amazon isn't overly concerned if "Air" loses money at the box office. To be profitable in cinemas, where studios split revenue with exhibitors, movies must double their production and marketing budgets, meaning the Affleck-Damon film would need to gross at least $260 million. However, opening "Air" in wide release means it will hit the company's Prime Video streaming service with more buzz. That's partly why Amazon expects to release a dozen movies in theaters annually, while Apple is preparing to debut Ridley Scott's "Napoleon" and Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon" exclusively on the big screen before bringing them to Apple TV+. That leaves theaters with a greater selection of movies to screen. And it's critically important because the number of major releases is still down 20% from pre-COVID levels.

That's not to say that the future is bright for the big screen. Many companies in the sector are struggling. CineWorld, the second-largest theater chain, is bankrupt and had to drop its plans to sell its U.S. and U.K. businesses after failing to find a buyer. It will instead raise funding to keep its operations in those countries going. And AMC, the biggest cinema company, has nearly $5 billion in debt on its balance sheet. It's been kept alive because it improbably became a meme stock during the pandemic, with investors fueling its rise based on sentiment instead of fundamentals. That seems to be ending. After AMC's stock was boosted to a high of more than $72 a share in 2021, it has plunged back to Earth and now trades at around $5.

Although the pandemic didn't lead to the decimation of theaters, with the number of screens falling by roughly 5%, a few prominent locations may have dimmed their marquees forever. The Arclight chain of high-end theaters is defunct, Hollywood's iconic Cinerama Dome remains shuttered, and Regal Union Square in New York, once the highest-grossing cinema in the country, plans to close.

Privately, movie studios long griped that exhibitors didn't do enough to make their theaters destinations, that they threw movies up on their screens without attending to the niceties of customer service (they're probably right). But they've also come to realize that consumers aren't going to sign up for Netflix and all its challengers. If they want their movies to be seen, they need a different model.

"There are only so many people who will subscribe to your streaming service, so if you want to attract eyeballs to your movies, theatrical becomes a much more efficient option," says Eric Wold, an analyst with B. Riley & Co.

As for Jeff Logan, he's pleased that studios, after behaving like movie theaters needed them more than they needed cinemas, are changing their tune.

"Theaters want to say a big 'I told you so,'" he says.

The Phantom's Final Bow

Broadway's greatest hit may be closing, but its spirit will linger long after the last curtain call

By Gordon Cox

Ask Cameron Mackintosh if "The Phantom of the Opera" will be back, and he doesn't play coy.

"Of course it will return," he says. "All the great musicals do."

But the British mega-producer, whose credits include "Cats" and "Les Misérables," also speaks candidly about the forces pushing "Phantom," the longest-running show on Broadway, to end its record streak on April 16 after 35 years.

Even before lockdown, the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, which had fallen into a boom-or-bust pattern of sales fluctuations based on seasonal tourism influxes, seemed to be reaching the end of its life span. "Over the years, the number of good weeks at the box office started to shrink," Mackintosh says. "Some of the really bad weeks, we lost a lot of money, particularly in New York."

At the same time, the pandemic pushed up expenses at an accelerated pace. Prior to 2020, expenses would generally rise 3% to 4% annually. But according to "Phantom" general manager Aaron Lustbader, after lockdown they escalated by about 15%, driven by COVID costs like testing and increased staffing as well as hikes in security and advertising. Currently, keeping the show up and running means spending $950,000 a week.

"Now you look at a $1 million week at the box office and you think, 'Oh, thank God, we've broken even.' That's a huge mental shift," Mackintosh says. "The margins have shrunk hugely."

Meanwhile, post-lockdown sales slowed across Broadway, dampened by early performance disruptions, changes in consumer lifestyles and the lagging return of international tourists and city visitors, particularly suburbanites. Integral to the reopening of "Phantom" in October 2021 were the pandemic funds secured from insurance and from the federal Shuttered Venue Operators Grant.

"Even with that money, until I actually announced in September that the show was in its final months, we were losing money every week," Mackintosh says.

That announcement broke the losing streak, with "Phantom" now playing to packed houses and, in its final stretch, topping $3 million in weekly sales. The closing, originally scheduled for February, was pushed to mid-April — when the Majestic Theatre will undergo much-needed renovations put off by 30-plus years of constant performances.

The shuttering marks the end of an era for a production that has become synonymous with Broadway, a tourist attraction akin to a city landmark. Part of a wave of massively successful, London-born mega-musicals that revitalized Broadway in the 1980s, "Phantom" has, since its 1988 opening, weathered the disruptions of the 9/11 attacks and surmounted its first bout of sagging sales thanks to a 2004 film adaptation. The movie was a critically panned flop, but its marketing campaign, centered on the protagonist's iconic half-mask and powered by a hefty Hollywood budget, nonetheless drove audiences back to the stage musical.

Surpassing "Cats" in 2006 as the longest-running production on Broadway, "Phantom" has grossed more than $1.3 billion in New York alone, not counting its many international and touring productions. Along the way the show became a steady job for cast members, crew, musicians and others in an unpredictable industry.

While Mackintosh is bullish on the musical's eventual return — "There'll be a tour at some point too," he promises — it won't be back in its current costly form. For clues to what a new version might look like, he points to the London production, a reimagining of the original with a smaller orchestra and a handful of design changes.

"My plan was to burnish the reputation of 'Phantom,' not let it seep away," Mackintosh says. "For now, I hope people will remember that it went out doing the most fabulous business of all time."

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Clockwise from top left: 1988 original poster; Michael Crawford with his Tony in 1988; Hugh Panaro and Sierra Boggess, circa 2012-13; Boggess and Norm Lewis at the 11,000th performance celebration in 2014; 2000 poster; 2014 mosaic window card

Crawford: Robin Platzer/Getty Images; Panaro/Boggess: Joan Marcus; Boggess/Lewis: Walter McBride/Getty Images

A LETTER TO STEVEN SPIELBERG
FROM A 93 YEAR OLD HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

Dear Steven,

Before I go to meet my family lost in the Holocaust, I do want to bring to your attention one of my creative works called “ONIUS.” A science fiction one-hour episodic drama for which I wrote 7 episodes.

These episodes contain a joint effort of an experiment originating on planet Onius. The fight is on among the aliens over the correct intervention to combat the human nature of self-destruction. It unfolds in a mission to decipher the human brain by ORINA an Onian scientist. It evolves into a combined enterprise with a futuristic invention in the medical field created on planet Earth.

So happens in this work among other things I dared to go back to Auschwitz taking a science fiction way to do it, at the same time merging with all the different concepts I created in all of the 7 episodes. Each episode brings an excitement of its own, yet, they are all merging with one-another.

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Have Feathers — Will Travel

Angie Dickinson on ‘riding that horse’ called showbiz across a seven-decade career

By Todd Gilchrist

Director Howard Hawks and Angie Dickinson on the set of “Rio Bravo”

Everett Collection

“Fair to middling” is how Angie Dickinson is feeling this morning as she talks about “Rio Bravo,” the 1959 film that made her a star. “Somebody who says they’re great at 90, you can figure out that they lie a lot.” It’s a line that could have come straight from Jules Furthman and Leigh Brackett’s script for the film — and a reminder that Dickinson’s gift for delivery isn’t dependent on working with a brilliant director, though she has many times in her seven-decade career.

Dickinson has more than 350 screen credits — an enormous body of work that includes “Ocean’s Eleven” (the 1960 original), “Point Blank” and “Dressed to Kill.” She’s set to appear April 13 at the TCM Film Festival to introduce a 4K restoration of Howard Hawks’ classic Western, whose boys’ club cast of John Wayne, Dean Martin, Ricky Nelson and Walter Brennan she breaks up with that same brisk humor. Ahead of the event, Dickinson speaks with *Variety* about first catching the acting bug after spying Frank Sinatra (later a lifelong friend) on the set of “The Jimmy Durante Show,” working with Brian De Palma, and other highlights from a lifetime of memories.

● **What was the path that led you to "Rio Bravo"?** There was a beauty contest, a promotion for "The Jimmy Durante Show." They called me where I worked at the airplane factory and said, "You want to be on the show on Sunday?" They were already starting rehearsals... and right at the door where I walked in, there was Frank Sinatra singing with Jimmy Durante. I said, "Oh, I've got to be a part of this!"

● **Wait, you worked at an airplane factory? What was your job there?** I worked as the boss's secretary. It was a wonderful job, [but] finally I got too much work to keep the job going as well.

● **What was the experience of getting cast in "Rio Bravo" like?** Oh, it was spectacular. But I was just like everybody else — whenever there was a great star or a great part around, everybody tried to get it. And I worked very, very hard to get in shape. I needed a little bit of massaging to get the extra fat off of my arms and legs and all that stuff. Frank Gifford, who played for the [New York Giants], played John Wayne's part in my test because he was also under contract to Warner Bros. Howard Hawks didn't talk much, so you had to figure out what he wanted.

● **Was John Wayne's natural stoicism easy to play against?** Yeah, because that was pretty true to his true nature. Very quiet and respectful — not loving, exactly, but showing he had the pleasure of your company. Well, once you're in with Hawks and Wayne, you'd do anything and everything they ask you to do.

● **Feathers epitomizes the Hawksian woman. Did you know enough about his work for that to give you a window into the role?** I was not that far into my show business career to be that smart, and even didn't recognize his style. But I wasn't intimidated. He would not hesitate to take a full hour just to sit and talk with me. I thought we were talking about the scene, and he just wanted me to be totally myself so he didn't have to give me direction, which is what he would want — because otherwise all of his lady stars would be the same.

Esquire
SIXTY YEARS of WOMEN WE LOVE

The 1993 Esquire cover celebrating Dickinson's 1966 photo shoot

● **You had a number of iconic moments, like your 1966 "Esquire" pinup where you were only wearing a sweater and a pair of white pumps. Was selling your sexuality something that you embraced as a necessary evil? Or did you struggle to be comfortable with that?** I didn't have to struggle to be comfortable with compliments or with success. I'm a North Dakota girl, but even with my modest beginnings, I never felt out of place in show business, and I took it for what it was and I didn't make more of it. And so I think I rode that horse very gradually and pretty soon got to be a pretty good rider.

● **Are there films from your career you're especially proud of?** "Big Bad Mama" is pretty funny, if you can get past the young girl. "Dressed to Kill," I would like to have been in it just a little bit more before they knocked me off.

● **Audiences have embraced that film more in recent years. How was Brian De Palma to work with?** He was great and he [allowed] no fussiness. It was hard work because he was a very serious filmmaker, and then he took on serious subjects, so you have to do it that way. But he was a master director — oh, my God.

● **As "Rio Bravo" is being rereleased in 4K, are there moments from your career, or from this film, that you'll always carry with you?** Literally I don't know where I would be if it weren't for "Rio Bravo," number one. But also the memory of Walter Brennan and John Wayne and Howard Hawks and Dean — memories sad and happy both.

Alison Herman Joins *Variety* as TV Critic

By Variety Staff

Alison Herman is *Variety*'s new TV critic, joining chief TV critic Daniel D'Addario. In the role, Herman will be a key voice in television criticism, writing reviews, commentary, appreciations and cover stories across all of *Variety*'s platforms. She will work with editor-at-large Kate Aurthur, who oversees the publication's TV criticism and features.

Herman was a staff writer at The Ringer from 2016 to 2023, where she covered television and popular culture. During her tenure, she wrote columns on new shows, profiled performers such as John Mulaney and reported the definitive piece on the aesthetics of "Succession."

"TV criticism is one of the bedrocks of *Variety*, as the No. 1 brand covering the business of entertainment," co-Editors-in-Chief Cynthia Littleton and Ramin Setoodeh say. "Alison's deep knowledge of television and pop culture make her the perfect addition to our team."

Says Herman: "I couldn't be more excited to cover television at the leading voice in entertainment coverage. Readers trust *Variety* to help them sort through the noise, and I hope my criticism can be a part of that mission."

Alison Herman

Esquire: Courtesy Esquire; Herman: Courtesy Alison Herman

The Little Epic That Did

'Seven Kings Must Die' wraps up one of Netflix's biggest sleeper hits

By Joe Otterson

"The Last Kingdom" didn't get nearly the promotional push that HBO's "Game of Thrones" or Amazon's "Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power" received. And it didn't have anything like the budgets of those shows. Yet, as the historical drama series concludes with Netflix film "Seven Kings Must Die," it's proving once again why it is one of the most popular shows on streaming.

Originally produced for the BBC in 2015 before moving to Netflix for its third season, "The Last Kingdom" has become a sleeper hit for the streamer. The show is regularly praised for its performances, production design and breathtaking battle scenes. The numbers tell the story: Nielsen ranked "The Last Kingdom" at No. 14 on its list of the top 15 streaming originals of 2022, coming in above "The Rings of Power" and not far below Netflix hits "Wednesday," "Stranger Things" and "The Crown."

Based on the "Saxon Stories" novels by Bernard Cornwell, "The Last Kingdom" loosely traces the formation of England in the ninth and 10th centuries. At the center of the saga is Uhtred of Bebbanburg, a warrior played by Alexander Dreymon, and his quest to reclaim his ancestral lands from his uncle.

Arnas Fedaravičius, Alexander Dreymon and Mark Rowley star in "Seven Kings Must Die."

Marcell Piti/Netflix

"Seven Kings Must Die," which premieres April 14, picks up where "The Last Kingdom" leaves off. While Uhtred's mission has been fulfilled, one major question remains: "This dream that we talk about throughout the series that Alfred had of a unified England — we haven't seen that yet," Dreymon says. "I think it's a beautiful way to wrap it up in a different medium."

Also returning for the finale are Arnas Fedaravičius and Mark Rowley, who play compatriots of Uhtred. Word that a movie had been greenlighted came just as production on the series' fifth and final season was ending, Rowley says.

"We were filming the final battle, and one of the execs called me up," Rowley says. "I was very happy, even though I was getting my ass kicked on set."

Working on a film would seem to afford cast and crew more breathing room than they had on the show. But the time crunch was no different for "Seven Kings," which, like the series, was shot in Hungary.

"You're on a much shorter schedule, so this thing where you can go back and make up time, you don't have that luxury," says executive producer Nigel Marchant of Carnival Films. "But you still want it to look and feel cinematic, not just bolted on the end of the TV series."

Fedaravičius credits Dreymon with buoying spirits on set when the pressure was on. "We have a great leader in Alex," he says. "His work ethic is one of the most impeccable, alongside Mark. That energy trickles down. However tight the schedules become, everybody feels like they want to do the work."

That sense of camaraderie echoes one of the major themes running through "The Last Kingdom." Neither the series nor "Seven Kings" shies away from bloody fighting and violent deaths, but the characters are equally fearless about revealing their softer sides during the darkest of Dark Ages.

"To be able to show that vulnerable side is what makes them such wonderful characters to watch, because there's so many dimensions to it," Dreymon says. "That's thanks to the writing, and thanks to all the wonderful actors we've worked with."

It is a rare thing for a show to catch lightning in a bottle the way "The Last Kingdom" has, but as Uhtred is fond of saying, "Destiny is all." ⓥ

OUR TOWN

JUST FOR VARIETY

by Marc Malkin

Mark Consuelos (1) doesn't mind hand-me-downs from **Ryan Seacrest**. Consuelos tells me he's inheriting Seacrest's dressing room when "Live With Kelly and Ryan" becomes "Live With Kelly and Mark" on April 17. "I'm no dummy," Consuelos says on this week's episode of the "Just for Variety" podcast. "Ryan is very fancy — he's got fancy stuff."

When it was announced in February that Seacrest was leaving "Live," it also was revealed that Consuelos will replace him as his wife **Kelly Ripa**'s co-host. "The first conversations started with like, 'That is the worst idea ever,'" Consuelos recalls. As *Variety*'s **Elizabeth Wagmeister** reported in March in a cover profile of Ripa for the Power of Women issue, the longtime host's deal is about $20 million a year. Consuelos says of his pay, "This is my first contract on the job, so I shouldn't make anywhere near what she makes. ... I'm the newbie, so yeah, I won't be playing hardball for sure."

And he won't be discussing their sex life on "Live." Ripa opened up, during her recently launched "Let's Talk Off Camera With Kelly Ripa" podcast, about how she and Consuelos engage in virtual sex when he's out of town. "She is an open book," Consuelos says, explaining he thinks that's one reason audiences have stayed with her for 22 years of "Live." Then he adds, "I definitely do not think we'll be talking about that from 9 to 10 a.m. on Mondays through Fridays."

•••

Marcus Mumford (2) may have created music for "Ted Lasso" and "Daisy Jones & the Six," but that doesn't mean he's itching to start acting. "I'm good. I'm married to an actor," says Mumford, whose wife is **Carey Mulligan** (3). "I've seen enough of what goes on behind the camera. I'm never doing that fucking thing in my life. No chance!"

•••

SIGHTINGS: Former Academy president **David Rubin** getting in an early-morning workout at Equinox in West Hollywood at the same time as **Benny Medina**, **Neil Meron** and "Million Dollar Listing New York" star **Fredrik Eklund** ... **Annette Bening** taking her leftover lunch to-go at Hugo's in WeHo.

•••

Seth Rogen promises that he hasn't tried to get **Steven Spielberg** to smoke weed. The director made headlines when he told me at the Palm Springs Intl. Film Festival that he's never gotten stoned. Then **Jimmy Kimmel** referenced the never-toker while hosting the Oscars. "I don't want to be the guy who breaks his brain," Rogen told me at the "Super Mario Bros. Movie" premiere. "If he does, God bless him, but I'm not going to be the guy who pressures him to do it."

•••

It's been more than a decade since **Marion Cotillard** (4) met **Will Ferrell** (5) about shooting a Funny or Die video. "I'm the biggest Will Ferrell fan. It was really awkward," Cotillard tells me. "I literally jumped on him." Three years later, she made a cameo in "Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues." Cotillard thinks it's time for her and Ferrell to star in a movie. "I love comedy but I don't do much of it," she says. "I've seen 'Step Brothers' 10 times. It has the same effect on me every time. I laugh and then cry at the end."

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

Consuelos: Karwai Tang/WireImage/Getty Images; Mumford: Shannon Finney/Getty Images; Mulligan: Gregg DeGuire/WireImage/Getty Images; Cotillard: Marc Piasecki/WireImage/Getty Images; Ferrell: Cindy Ord/Getty Images

EXPOSURE

Edited by Marc Malkin

2023
WARS
RATI
PE
TAR

OUT OF THIS WORLD: “Ahsoka” stars **Natasha Liu Bordizzo**, **Rosario Dawson** and **Mary Elizabeth Winstead** attend Star Wars Celebration 2023 at ExCeL London on April 7.

Jeff Spicer/Getty Images for Disney

Donald Glover

Hoyeon and Apple's Tim Cook

Édgar Ramirez and Abbey Lee

Swae Lee

April 6

GQ Global Creativity Awards

WSA, New York

The inaugural event honored "Squid Game" star **Hoyeon**, **Donald Glover** and **Tim Cook**, among others. "While I was gifted with so many unbelievable experiences thanks to 'Squid Game,' I also experienced moments of self-doubt. One day, I wondered, 'Am I too much?' And the next day, I asked myself, 'Am I enough?'" Hoyeon said after being presented with her award by "Pachinko" author **Min Jin Lee**. "Through it all, I have come to understand that in order to be fearlessly creative, the question that matters is, am I myself?"

April 4

'Shucked' Opening

Nederlander Theatre, New York

Set in the fictional Cob County, the original musical comedy follows Maizy (**Caroline Innerbichler** in her Broadway debut) as she leaves her small town to find a solution for the community's rotting corn crops. It's directed by **Jack O'Brien**, known for "Hairspray," "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels" and "Porgy and Bess." "People can expect to laugh a lot and hear really great music that squeezes your heart a little bit," star **Andrew Durand** told *Variety*. "I think it sneaks up on you with this sort of message. It's not beaten over your head, but there's a lot of love and laughter [that] people can expect in an unexpected way."

Caroline Innerbichler, Jack O'Brien and Andrew Durand

Kelsea Ballerini and Chase Stokes

Shane McAnally and Alex Newell

Jesse Tyler Ferguson and Justin Mikita

Kevin Cahoon

Hoyeon/Cook: Dimitrios Kambouris/Getty Images for GQ; Glover, Ramirez/Lee, Lee: Aurora Rose DeCrosta for Variety (3); Shucked: Nina Westervelt for Variety (5)

EXPOSURE

Seth Meyers and Judy Blume

Chilli

April 4

Variety Power of Women New York

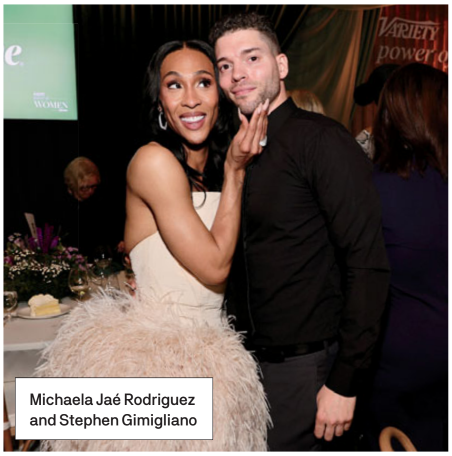
The Grill, New York

Honoree **Judy Blume** blasted Florida Gov. **Ron DeSantis** for his legislative moves to censor public education in the Sunshine State. “The reality is, we are right back where we were in the ’80s, except it’s the ’80s on steroids. … This time it’s not the Moral Majority or only the religious right. This time it is coming from our government,” said Blume, who was presented with her award by **Seth Meyers**. “Lawmakers, drunk with power, with a need to control everything. Sure, it’s still sexuality, but it’s gender, it’s LGBTQ+, it’s racism, it’s history itself that’s under fire.” **Rosie Perez**, who received her award from **Spike Lee**, gave a heartfelt speech describing the struggles she’s had in Hollywood as a woman of color. “All the trials, tribulations and successes by women who risked their lives and livelihood have changed the world, and I wholeheartedly applaud the efforts of the women’s movement to move with the times,” Perez said, adding, “I just ask folks to consider that we all can do better. The onus to do better is not solely on women. Every single human being on this planet can participate.”

Kelly Ripa flanked by *Variety*’s Cynthia Littleton, Ramin Setoodeh and Michelle Sobrino-Stearns

Rosie Perez, Spike Lee and LaTanya Richardson Jackson

Lea Michele



Michaela Jaé Rodriguez and Stephen Gimigliano

Natasha Lyonne and Cherry Jones

Sandra Bernhard and Sherri Shepherd

Meyers/Blume, Perez/Lee/Jackson, Lyonne/Jones, Rodriguez/Gimigliano, Bernhard/Shepherd: Jamie McCarthy/Variety via Getty Images (5); Chilli, Littleton/Setoodeh/Rip/Sobrino-Stearns, Michele: Dimitrios Kambouris/Variety via Getty Images (3)

IT'S A TOUGH TOWN.

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A LATE BLOOMER TO FAME, ‘TED LASSO’ STAR **BRETT GOLDSTEIN** IS USING THIS MOMENT TO MAKE HIS MARK ON HOLLYWOOD

By **MICHAEL SCHNEIDER**

Photographs by **PEGGY SIROTA**

JUST FOR KICKS

Here's the quickest way to make Brett Goldstein speechless: Ask the "Ted Lasso" star and "Shrinking" co-creator how he feels about becoming a sex symbol. "This is the first I've heard of it," he tells me, after almost doing a spit-take when I bring up what I've dubbed "Sexy Brett Goldstein."

"I'm flattered you're telling me this, and I will expect you to address me as such from now on," he says, grinning at the madness of me broaching such a silly topic. "How do I feel about becoming a sex symbol? I don't know. You can say, 'He blushes, looks confused, his head explodes.'"

Sexy Brett Goldstein blushes and looks confused. His head explodes. "Listen," he says, "If that's a thing, that has nothing to do with me. That has to do with the show, right? Because of the character."

The way Goldstein distances himself from the hoopla all around him says something about how he's grappling with his growing fame. He's been a successful actor and writer in the U.K. for nearly two decades, but everything's changed since 2020, when Apple TV+'s "Ted Lasso" became the definition of a sleeper hit.

QUIXOTE
STING-RAY SLIK

> **“I think what stops most people is ‘What if it’s not perfect?’ I’m like, ‘I know it’s not going to be perfect; it’s the first draft. And then we’re going to rewrite it a million times.’ So just get it down.”**

Goldstein is a two-time Emmy winner for playing the gruff footballer-turned-coach Roy Kent in “Ted Lasso,” now in the middle of its third season. Roy, known for his forceful use of the word “Fuck!” to punctuate his feelings, is the kind of angry yet sensitive character that causes audiences to melt — and swoon.

“Yeah, the grumpy guy,” Goldstein says. “Maybe it’s hairy men. I seem to be the only person in L.A. who has body hair. Maybe that’s a thing. Like, ‘Whoa, what’s this? This is new!’”

Goldstein is also riding high on the success of “Shrinking,” the Apple TV+ drama series that he crafted with “Ted Lasso” co-creator Bill Lawrence. And he’s getting a lot more inquiries for high-profile film roles; he sparked shrieks of delight from Marvel fans online after he appeared as a superbuff Hercules in one of the bonus scenes at the end of 2022’s “Thor: Love and Thunder.” Earlier this year, the producers of the animated series “Harley Quinn” featured a ripped and hairy cartoon Sexy Brett Goldstein as the star of the one-man show “Brett Goldstein Reads the Works of Lord Byron Shirtless While Polishing His Trophy.” “I really worked out for that,” he jokes.

Mae Martin, a friend of Goldstein and a fellow comedian, has watched his rise to boldface-name status. “I think he has a healthy level of embarrassment and bewilderment about it,” says Martin, who hosts a weekly comedy show with Goldstein at Los Angeles’ Largo where they lean into the whole sexy thing — closing the act by taking off each other’s shirts and making out.

“Like all good British comedians, Brett thinks he’s a worm,” Martin adds. “I hope he continues to, even though he’s always been so handsome. But it’s funny — since ‘Ted Lasso,’ even I’m seeing him in a new light. He’s got some new mojo going on. Maybe Roy Kent unlocked some archetypal masculinity in him that now he can’t shut off and it’s like catnip to people.”

The irony is that Goldstein is nothing like Roy Kent. The two may share a similar anxiety about the world around them and a love for the F-word, but beyond that, they handle themselves very differently. “He’s a very soft-spoken, gentle dude,” says “Shrinking” star and exec producer Jason Segel. “It speaks to what an amazing actor he is, because, frankly, I don’t find him very much like Roy at all. He’s really, really sweet.”

Goldstein says he hears all the time from people who marvel that he doesn’t seem to share the character’s rage. “I really love playing Roy Kent,” he says. “People always say, ‘You don’t seem angry in real life.’ And I’m always like, ‘But I’m fucking angry.’ And maybe there is a part of me that gets to process it through Roy.”

Lawrence sees shades of Roy in Goldstein but with key differences that make him a good collaborator on both sides of the camera. “The language and the darkness inside is real. But how one man meets it with an open-arms sensitivity and the other is just closed off are completely different,” Lawrence says.

Whatever combination of angry and sweet he is, Goldstein still feels unsteady, at times, in his newfound fame.

“I worry I died a long time ago,” he says. “And this has all been like a post-death, pre-heaven dream.”

At 42, Brett Goldstein has indeed reached a strange point in his journey to becoming a superstar. “Touch wood, I have a lot more opportunities to do many of the things that I’ve wanted to do for a long time,” he says as we get comfortable in a dark booth at Burbank’s Smoke House restaurant. It’s the kind of place, across the street from the Warner Bros. lot, where the mostly older clientele keep to themselves, and Goldstein can let his guard down. (It’s not until near the end of our two-hour chat that the joint has gotten busier, and a few fans have become bold enough to ask for a selfie with Roy Kent.)

“So that’s incredible,” Goldstein says of the options now coming his way. But the downside is he forgets that he’s now Roy Kent. Or Hercules. “I go out to a Ralphs at midnight because I want to get some groceries, and suddenly I’m accosted. It’s kind of a weird thing where you go, ‘Oh shit, of course.’”

But he’s not complaining. Like with the Sexy Brett Goldstein stuff, he’s still adjusting to it all. “You just have to be grateful. Because this is it, right? I can’t undo it.”

It took a beat for Goldstein to find his groove. For years he pursued dramatic gigs, but “all I would ever get audition offers for was terrorists. I guess they see my headshot and go, ‘Well, he looks like a terrorist!’”

Ever the late bloomer, Goldstein was 27 when he first grabbed a stand-up mic. “I fucking stormed it,” he says. “The adrenaline was so powerful that I had a great gig, and I was like, ‘Wow! *Fuck*!’”

Then came the grind. “I died, died, died, died. Hundreds of gigs. It was embarrassing and depressing and humiliating.” Goldstein had become a minor celebrity in the U.K., appearing in series like Ricky Gervais’ “Derek,” but he was never *famous* famous. So his friend and frequent writing partner Will Bridges is now astonished

(Opening spread) Styling: Rose Forde/The Wall Group; Styling Assistant: Daniella Nikolic; Grooming: Kerrie Urban/The Wall Group; Production Design: Francisco Vargas; Top & pants: Lanvin; Shoes: Jimmy Choo; (Previous spread) Clothing: Christian Dior

at the speed at which his mate has become a household name.

“It did come as a shock, right?” Bridges says. “I’ve never seen him wear a baseball cap until he started getting famous. He’s got to wear the cap when he goes out and be careful about where he goes and stuff like that. And he accepts it. He’s fine with it. I’ve never heard him complain. But for me, the sadness of it is that we can’t just hang out in a café and chat now.”

Most recently, this wild ride took Goldstein to the White House, where the “Ted Lasso” cast sat down with President Biden to talk about the importance of mental health. “It’s so surreal. I have to really work to tell myself, ‘Be present and enjoy this amazing thing,’” he says. “Because your brain is almost disassociating going, ‘This doesn’t make any sense. I’m walking into the Oval Office, and there’s Mr. President and first lady Dr. Biden.’ Your brain is like, ‘What the fuck is happening?’”

Goldstein thinks about death a lot. His podcast, “Films to Be Buried With,” tackles the subject of dying, but through the lens of movies — for instance, if you had to choose one movie to bring to heaven, which would it be? But Goldstein isn’t morbid about the inevitability of death; instead, he’s motivated by it.

The star often jokes that he’s glad he didn’t achieve this level of success while in his 20s. “I’d probably be going insane, doing the Hollywood parties and ending up dead in a gutter,” he says and laughs, knowing that’s not really true. But Goldstein gets that the clock is ticking, and he wants to use that time wisely.

“I tend to think it’s sort of how I make decisions. Like, ‘Oh, I’ll be dead in a minute, so I might as well do this.’” What he might as well do includes a sold-out April 8 stand-up show at a 2,000-seat Seattle theater, making it his largest solo concert to date. It doesn’t faze him. “I’m sure, on the way to Seattle, I’ll be, ‘Oh God, this is happening!’ But I don’t need to waste three weeks worrying about it. Because at some point, I’m going to be dead. I keep having to say that.”

And if the fame runs out? “I had a great little run. And what a life — an amazing life. I’ll have made enough money that I can live by the sea, which is what I want. If Seattle is a disaster and everyone is like, ‘Kill him. This is the worst thing we’ve ever seen,’ I’ll be that guy who lives by the sea.”

But hold up. That’s not what Goldstein wants now. “Shrinking” has become a critical hit and the perfect salve for our post-pandemic times in the same way that “Ted Lasso” was at the start of COVID. “Shrinking” dives into issues of mental health, grief and relationships — and is also (Roy Kent voice here) fucking funny.

Segel plays a recent widower who is finally reconnecting with his daughter after falling into a black hole of grief. “For me, it’s always about the characters and the relationships,” Goldstein says. “And with ‘Shrinking,’ what interested me was the story of a father and a daughter. He has not been there for her, and as he’s coming back to himself, he’s trying to repair things. And what’s interesting is this attempt to be forgiven and to be her dad again, and whether she will allow him — the change of dynamic between a father and a child over a season. That was what first got me excited.”

But “Shrinking” also tells the stories of the people around the little family, and how they’re struggling with changes in their own lives — including Harrison Ford’s character, who is adjusting to life with Parkinson’s disease. Turns out that’s a very personal storyline for Goldstein; his dad is living with Parkinson’s, an experience that went a long way in drafting Ford’s role.

“I think the specificity of that storyline can only be achieved from experience,” Segel says. “There are such micro moments for that character that Harrison just plays so beautifully and so subtly. I think that’s very much from the experience of someone who has dealt with those things. And that’s what makes it work.”

The “Shrinking” team is busy putting together scripts for Season 2, and this time out, Goldstein gets to be in the Burbank writers’ room in person, rather than on Zoom. The first season was produced while he was in London working on “Ted Lasso.” This kind of juggling act has become his norm.

“It’s a little bit of an insatiable work ethic that some of these Brits have,” says Lawrence. “I don’t like it.” When he first approached Goldstein about writing on Season 1 of “Ted Lasso,” Goldstein was writing a film, “Nan,” starring Catherine Tate, while also waiting to see if the series he created with Bridges, “Soulmates,” would be ordered to series. (It was.)

Goldstein, Jason Sudeikis and Brendan Hunt on Season 3 of “Ted Lasso”

(This page) AppleTV+; (Following spread) Top: COS; Pants: Dzojchen; Coat: Vince; Sneakers: Santoni DBS

"So Brett was simultaneously writing on 'Ted Lasso' and then shooting 'Ted Lasso,' and then writing the movie 'Nan,' and then leaving Thursday through Sunday to run his own show in Mallorca, Spain, where he was the head writer. It was crazy," Lawrence says.

Goldstein says his secret to writing fast is not to overthink things. "It's not me; it's like magic. I don't know where it comes from." He wants to offer some writing advice but is hesitant. "This is going to sound so mad," he says, "so I'll shut my mouth now."

But, pressed, he speaks up. "I think what stops most people is 'What if it's not perfect?' I'm like, 'I know it's not going to be perfect; it's the first draft. And then we're going to rewrite it a million times.' So just get it down."

If it sounds like Brett Goldstein is running a marathon right now, it's because he is. "I always feel like I'm making up for lost time that I didn't enjoy as a youth," he says. "Because I was a very miserable kid. I was so miserable as a young person that now I enjoy things more."

Part of Goldstein's stand-up routine has focused on being a grumpy old man as a kid. "I was a 6-year-old who sighed a lot," he says. "I was born this way. I had a dark way."

Even back then, at least one thing made Young Brett Goldstein happy: movies. "I guess it was through my mom and dad," he says. "My mom and dad were film buffs. But I liked films so much that I think I ruined it for them. Even they were like, 'Fuck, it's only film!'"

Goldstein was a comedy fan and collected Richard Pryor and Steve Martin albums. But in terms of film, he liked the dark stuff. Particularly horror. It was a TV show, though — "Twin Peaks" — that changed his life. Goldstein still remembers how he and his sister walked in on their dad watching the 1990 premiere and got hooked.

"We were so scared that I moved the mattress from my room into my sister's and put it next to her bed. We were obsessed with the show and so genuinely terrified that we could scare ourselves just by saying 'Bob,'" he says.

The show remains an obsession: "People ask, 'What do you do to relax?' What always makes me happy is looking up 'Twin Peaks' fan theories. I love reading about 'Twin Peaks.' I love thinking about 'Twin Peaks.' It exists in my head now and forever."

> “I had therapy this morning and we were talking about something, and I was like, ‘Fucking hell, man, after all I’ve done to get better in my head, there’s still *this*!’”

So will “Ted Lasso” be back for a fourth season? It’s the question on everyone’s minds — a White House staffer even made a joke about it when Goldstein and company visited. But no, not even the president of the United States has been told whether there will be another loop for “Lasso.”

For the record, Goldstein would like the show to continue, and he has ideas. But he also respects that it’s Jason Sudeikis’ call. “I really do get that it’s a hard decision. Because it’s this wonderful thing, and these three seasons feel really perfect. Do you gamble? Do you leave the table? Or do you keep going because you have more?”

What Goldstein does object to is the idea that “Ted Lasso” should end before it turns to shit. “I’m like, ‘No, it wouldn’t get shit. Because it’s a really good fucking group of people who care about it. Jason’s a fucking genius. No way we’d make something shit. Because why would we suddenly be shit? Have we suddenly all gotten shit at our jobs?”

Goldstein has a bit of confidence now, having two hit shows on the air, a sold-out stand-up show, the potential of a Hercules movie from Marvel and that whole sexy thing. And it’s not only his advanced age that lets Goldstein calmly handle this sudden burst of success — self-care is something that matters to him.

“The mental health thing is a forever thing,” he says. “I had therapy this morning, and we were talking about something, and I was like, ‘Fucking hell, man, after all I’ve done to get better in my head, there’s still *this*!’”

Whatever “this” is, it’s not getting in Goldstein’s way, careerwise. Segel is pressing him to make a guest appearance on Season 2 of “Shrinking.” And next up: a long-gestating indie rom-com he’s been trying to make for years.

In other words, there’s no rest for Goldstein. “I don’t sleep,” he says. “I mean, I do. But, again, we go back to death. All jokes aside, I don’t know how long the window is. And I do feel like there’s so much I want to get out. I’m fit and healthy and have these opportunities. Let’s fucking do them.”

You heard Sexy Brett Goldstein. Let’s go. ●

IT'S COMP

INDUSTRY INSIDERS unload on their love-hate (MOSTLY HATE) relationships with the user interfaces of major streaming platforms

By
SELOME HAILU AND JENNIFER MAAS

TELEVISION VIEWING has never offered consumers more agency.

Though the streaming revolution has provided viewers with a dizzying array of TV and movie choices, it has also led to a free-for-all in how that content is accessed across various devices. Every streaming service has added custom touches to the overall user interface — the tabs, the rewind and fast-forward buttons and myriad other functions that viewers need in order to cue up their shows.

From the ability to speak into the Apple TV remote's microphone instead of using a search bar to the fateful day when Netflix allowed users to shut off the bombardment of homepage autoplay, the interactions that fans have with streaming services have come a long way.

But according to Hollywood insiders — who may have an even more critical eye than the average consumer about the screen time experience — more progress in the areas of user interface and user experience is needed as streaming takes root as TV's dominant delivery platform.

The next wave of this conversation will likely begin on April 12, as Warner Bros. Discovery raises the curtain on plans for its combined HBO Max and Discovery+ streaming service.

Boasting a huge library of TV and movies, HBO Max is one of the most used services on the market. But it has also sparked a lot of debate about its user experience. A query for "HBO Max app" in the Twitter search bar pulls up numerous expletive-riddled rants about glitchy streams and faulty rewind buttons.

Warner Bros. Discovery Chief Financial Officer Gunnar Wiedenfels admitted at a conference in January that the current service is "subpar." "We're going to come out with a great product from a consumer-experience perspective, and that's frankly the biggest holdback for HBO Max right now," he said. "The experience is not where it needs to be."

So where does that experience need to be? *Variety* spoke with 40 industry insiders about what they like, don't like and downright hate about using the major streaming platforms.

For Peter Gould, co-creator and executive producer of "Better Call Saul," the key is having an easy way to get to all the industry-pertinent information he seeks. "I love it when you have quick access to trailers. I love it when you can watch the end credits and see who was in it and freeze-frame it without having it jump right to the next episode. Sometimes there's not a way to do that and that's a pain," he says, adding, "I wish they would standardize a quick way to turn subtitles on and off. Every once in a while you want to go back and decode a line of dialogue."

"What We Do in the Shadows" writer and producer Paul Simms is unhappy with autoplay features. "I like ones that don't make me mute my TV," he says. "Any streaming service that doesn't have pre-rolled ads yelling at me, I'm fine with."

While Gould, Simms and other members of Hollywood are happy to discuss features they like and dislike in the abstract, it's harder to get straight answers about which streamers they favor and which they hate — or at least, which they find to be the lesser of evils.

"They're all bad. They're all so terrible," says Stephen Schiff, a writer and executive producer on such series as FX's "The Americans" and Disney+'s "Andor." "I don't want to say because I work for all of them. But they're all bad."

Amber Ruffin, the multi-hyphenate behind Peacock's "The Amber Ruffin Show," is one of the few to vociferously endorse the digital architecture of her home team. "I know this sounds like I'm a daddy's boy, but it's Peacock," she says when asked for her favorite platform. "Here's why: It tells you exactly where you left off on all of your favorite shows, but when you are scrolling and scrolling and scrolling, and you don't know what to watch, Peacock has this alternative: It has a bunch of channels, and you can just watch as if you're scrolling through television. You have less of a choice, and it narrows it down. I love that."

Variety surveyed sources from across all parts of the industry about the highs and lows of using Netflix, Hulu, HBO Max, Disney+, Paramount+, Amazon Prime Video, Discovery+, Apple TV+ and Peacock, strictly based on each of the platforms' UI.

LICATED

Remember: This isn't a conversation about content itself. It's about the way consumers interact with an app or website before, during and after they watch that content. Much of the following data is collected from insiders with current or previous work experience at the companies in question.

USERS ARE BAFFLED by the clunky experience provided by Amazon through its Prime Video platform. "For the company that innovated one-click shopping, the interface still feels surprisingly TJ Maxx," says one source. "There's a little bit of everything, but it's too hard to find the good stuff."

"You know what really pisses me off?" another source notes about both HBO Max and Peacock. "When you click on a title from the home screen and it immediately starts playing where you left off." While that feature seems an attempt to get consumers to their content as quickly as possible, users don't like having that decision made for them. "Sometimes I fall asleep watching TV," the source says. "So I want to see the episode menu first! They make it so annoying to find."

Netflix was most widely regarded as having the best UI, with several comments about how intuitive and aesthetically pleasing the platform is. But the most common complaint about the company that started the streaming revolution is that it can throw too much at you.

"I think it's badly curated," says a viewer. "Right now, in their 2022 Emmy nominees category, they have 'Selling Sunset' next to 'Maid.' I get it — 'Selling Sunset' is a Netflix original that I'm sure they want to show off. But if I'm looking for Emmy-nominated content, I'm probably looking for something more prestigious."

For a brutally honest sampling of the industry's takes on the apps that steal our weekends, read on.

NETFLIX

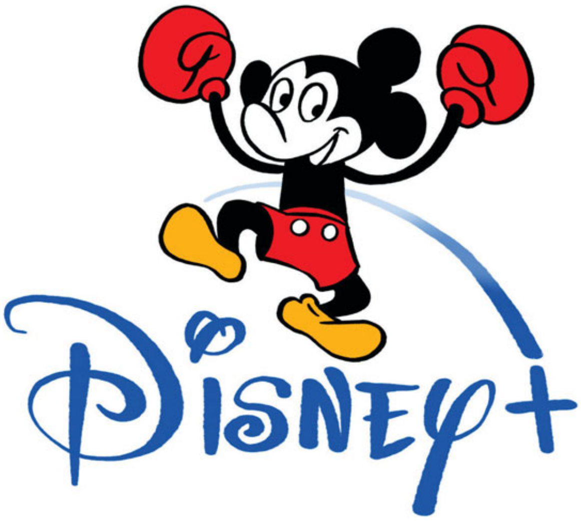
Old Reliable

- Fourteen sources say Netflix is their favorite interface for "ease of use," with five labeling it a "gold standard" or something similar.
- Four sources enjoy the Netflix Top 10 homepage display, though one finds it overwhelming.
- Two sources note higher-quality dubs and subtitles than other streamers'.

HULU

In Search Of

- Ten sources say that Hulu is generally well organized.
- Seven find the interface frustrating: three have difficulty navigating to their most watched titles; one dislikes the organization of the homepage.
- Three say Hulu's recommendations don't feel personalized, and browsing is rarely fruitful.



DISNEY+

Mouse Got Game

- Five sources find the UI clean, straightforward and aesthetically appealing.
- Five praise the organization of the content into branded hubs: Disney, Marvel, Pixar, Star Wars and Nat Geo.
- The two sources who have complaints about the app cite difficulty clearing the "Continue Watching" section and bypassing the PIN for adult accounts.

HBO MAX

Content Is King; Interface, Not So Much

- Eleven people enjoy the user interface, with most comments focusing on the search function and organization of the homepage.
- Nine dislike the platform, with four noting they love the content but feel they must endure the interface to watch what they like.
- Many complaints surround basic features like rewind buttons and virtual keyboard design, plus frequent bugs and stalling.
- Six say they regularly discover new favorites, though two of those viewers rank the platform as poor overall.

APPLE TV+

All That Glitters Is Not Gold

- Five sources say Apple TV+ is well designed and aesthetically appealing.
- Two enjoy its compatibility with the Apple TV device, though one finds the transition from the device interface to the streaming interface confusing.
- Two sources find the Apple ID login process convoluted.
- Two sources note frustration when sorting between titles included with a subscription and titles that must be rented or bought.
- Five people point out a lack of curation.

Illustrations by **ZOHAR LAZAR**

PARAMOUNT+

An Uphill Climb

- Of the 25 sources who mention Paramount+, only one has a positive comment, noting that the platform doesn't force users to rewatch ads if they rewind.
- Five people have complaints, including difficult navigation, confusing branding and frequently being logged out.
- The other 19 sources say it is among their least used streamers.

DISCOVERY+

Fixer-Upper

- Two sources say a lack of curation keeps them away from the service, with one noting the content is "like wallpaper — always there — so there's no urgency to view."
- Two people complain about the lack of smartphone authentication for login and an inaccurate "Continue Watching" section.
- Thirteen people count Discovery+ among their least used apps.

PEACOCK

Not Ready for Prime Time

- Thirteen people say Peacock is one of their least used services, with two only using it for live sports and "Yellowstone."
- Three praise the ease of access to branded hubs (Bravo, Hallmark, Telemundo, etc.).
- One enjoys the special features in the Bravo hub, like live-commentary tracks and interactive choose-your-reality cuts.
- Five people say the interface is buggy and stalls, and three say the search function is ineffective.
- Four people say their go-to shows rarely appear in the "Continue Watching" section.

prime
video

AMAZON PRIME VIDEO

An Empty Cart

- Fifteen sources describe Prime Video as the worst streaming UI — the strongest consensus in the survey.
- Of the 20 people who mention Amazon, only two have positive comments, both praising the X-Ray feature that highlights casting and production info, trivia and special features.
- Ten people find the homepage and navigation experience uncurated and confusing, with little emphasis on trending or personalized recommendations.
- Six people note frustration distinguishing between free titles and those available for rental or purchase.

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FOCUS

Miami Rises as Cultural Center

Magic City draws U.S. Hispanic and Latin American showbiz elite as leaders boost economic activity ● *By Anna Marie de la Fuente*

TRPU 171713 7
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Pipe Jaramillo/NBCUniversal Telemundo

↑ Miami-based "Armas de Mujer" ("'Til Jail Do Us Part") was developed and filmed at Telemundo Center, and shot in 47 locations across the city.

TELEMUNDO
COPA MUNDIAL DE LA FIFA 2022

← Miami-based media giant Telemundo scored with the 2022 World Cup.

> “Miami has an untapped resource of characters and stories.”
> — Billy Corben

Miami, home to the two leading U.S. Hispanic networks — TelevisaUnivision and Telemundo — as well as a host of smaller television companies, studio outposts, recording artists and independent entertainment companies, has long been the cultural epicenter of both Latin America and the U.S. Hispanic population.

“It is not just the geographic location that makes Miami a hub: In so many ways, the city is also representative of the cultural diversity across Latin America and among all U.S. Hispanics,” says Karen Barroeta, executive VP, production and development, Telemundo Global Studios, NBCUniversal Telemundo Enterprises.

“On top of its rich cultural diversity, Miami is a world-class city in which to make television, with the highest quality production studios and a skillful workforce including incredible talent, from production teams to writers and actors,” she says.

“Telemundo built roots in Miami because we believe in the growth and power of the Hispanic community and see Miami at the core of that explosive growth.”

Proof of Telemundo’s commitment to Miami is its $250 million. state-of-the-art facility boasting 13 studios, 48 open edit bay work stations and seven control rooms, allowing it to produce news, sports, scripted and unscripted entertainment, as well as digital content all under one roof, says Barroeta.

“Telemundo Center represents one of the largest investments in a broadcast facility in South Florida history, delivering over 3,000 hours of content a year and housing over 1,300 employees year-round across corporate and creative roles.”

Among its multiple productions: Miami-based “Armas de Mujer” (“’Til Jail Do Us Part”), filmed and developed in-house at Telemundo Center, and shot in 47 locations across the city.

For TelevisaUnivision, formed in January 2022 by the merger of U.S. Hispanic giant Univision and its Mexican counterpart, Televisa, its Miami headquarters is operationally integrated with La Fábrica de Sueños, or Dream Factory, Televisa’s studios in Mexico, “enabling a seamless and efficient production process,” says Ignacio Meyer, president, Univision Television Networks Group at TelevisaUnivision.

The merger led to a combined Spanish-language content library of more than 300,000 hours of programming and an extensive portfolio of IP and sports rights.

“Miami is a key source of best-in-class talent, know-how and resources. We leverage this to attract the right talent and build strong teams to create and produce both national and local entertainment, live music, reality and news shows with culturally relevant content that authentically resonates with our audiences,” he adds, listing such hit shows as the “Latin Grammy Awards,” “Mira Quién Baila” and “Enamorándonos.”

“The influence of Miami and South Florida is felt globally, so no matter where a project originates, it is very likely that many of the projects we develop, produce, program and promote draw inspiration, vision and creativity from Miami and South Florida,” Meyer says.

While Telemundo and TelevisaUnivision have their in-house crew and deep resources to offset the lack of incentives in the state, film companies don’t have it that easy.

Florida offered financial incentives to the film industry starting in 2004, but that ended in June 2016 when the state’s legislators decided the incentive program failed to deliver an adequate return on investment. Some also felt it wasn’t right to give financial incentives to private businesses.

“Since the incentives have disappeared, a lot of productions and crews have gone elsewhere,” says Billy Corben, director of the “Cocaine Cowboys” franchise who, along with his producing partner Alfred Spellman at their unscripted production company Rakontur — (a play on the word raconteur) — has continued to plumb Florida for its rich and colorful story material.

↓ Salvador “Sal” Magluta, left, and Augusto “Willy” are two of the main figures in Billy Corben’s “Cocaine Cowboys: The Kings of Miami.”

Sal Driver
SEAHAWK Racing Team
APBA
US 1
KSW
US1

World Cup: Telemundo; Cocaine Cowboys: Netflix

← Miami-Dade County mayor Daniella Levine Cava, and Miami Beach mayor Dan Gelber

The good news is that Miami-Dade county offers a TV, film and entertainment production incentive program, which provides grants to projects that shoot the bulk of their project in Miami-Dade County, and hire and pay a living wage to Miami-Dade residents, says the county's first female mayor, Daniella Levine Cava.

"Additionally, the board of county commissioners recently passed a resolution sponsored by [county commissioner Sen. René] Garcia to create the high impact film fund program to attract major television series and motion picture productions and enhance the economy, and to identify and allocate sufficient legally available funds for the program," she says.

"The content creation industry has a long history in Miami-Dade County that dates to the early 1900s. The industry continues to grow as the entertainment sector expands with the advent of new technologies that are fostering more creative content."

Spellman says, "Our first documentary, 'Raw Deal: A Question of Consent,' premiered at Sundance in 2001. At the time, we were the youngest [age 22] filmmakers ever invited to Sundance and the first ones from South Florida. Our film was very controversial and got a lot of attention, and when the agents and managers asked us if we were moving to Los Angeles, we said we wanted to return home. Just as Spike Lee and Martin Scorsese tell New York stories, we wanted to tell Miami stories so that's how we ended up staying put."

Corben adds: "Miami has an untapped resource of characters and stories. There's a saying I'm very fond of, 'Los Angeles is where you go when you want to be somebody, New York is where you go when you are somebody and Miami is where you go when you want to be somebody else.' "

Spellman concurs: "It's always been a place for shady people."

Since 2000, Rakontur has been producing a slew of documentaries and non-fiction series and shorts, mostly about Miami and Florida. The first film in their "Cocaine Cowboys" franchise, about the rise of the coke trade in Miami during the '70s and '80s, was distributed theatrically by Magnolia Films and won an Edward R. Murrow Award. Their documentary "God Forbid," about the sex scandal that took down evangelist Jerry Falwell Jr., is the most-watched doc on Hulu.

Meanwhile, Miami Beach's residents voted to approve a $159 million general obligation bond that will go toward the revitalization of arts and culture in the city, says Miami Beach mayor Dan Gelber. "This will allow us to create new venues and invest in a pretty extensive upgrade of our cultural profile," he says, adding that Miami Beach will also improve all its parks and create 88 acres of parkland.

With regard to Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and his policies, Gelber says: "We try to ignore him. He's only interested in stoking the culture wars, which we're not really interested in."

"Our focus is on creating valuable and engaging content for our audiences — creating shows that bring them together and deliver special moments," Meyer says. "We keep an eye toward the future and watch for trends and opportunities that will best serve our business and our audiences."

The more immediate challenges include skyrocketing real estate prices, climate change-induced floods and for Miami Beach, an influx of close to 15 million visitors a year for a town with some 385,000 residents. Not to mention a giant mass of seaweed said to be approaching Florida's coastline.

"Miami-Dade County is at the forefront of the housing and climate crisis, but we are also at the frontlines of innovative solutions to these challenges. We are working to make Miami-Dade County affordable, resilient and future ready," Levine Cava says.

Despite some drawbacks, "The sun still shines 300 days a year," Spellman says.

BY THE NUMBERS

The statistics below reflect entertainment industry economic activity in Miami-Dade County:

January 2022 – December 2022
Film permits issued: 551
Jobs created: 11,029
Hotel night stays: 7,612
Total local economic impact: $201 million

January 2023 – March 2023
Film permits issued: 163
Jobs created: 4,346
Hotel night stays: 2,032
Total local economic impact: $31.5 million

> **"The content creation industry has a long history in Miami-Dade county .... The industry continues to grow as the entertainment sectors expand with the advent of new technologies that are fostering more creative content."**
> **— Daniella Levine Cava**

↓ Grupo Firme and Camilo perform at the Billboard Latin Music Awards in Miami.

Mayor Daniella Levine Cava: Courtesy of the Office of Mayor Cava/Miami Dade; Grupo Firme: Telemundo

Showbiz's New Beachhead

***Variety* spotlights key players in Miami's booming entertainment industry revolution**

- *By Cata Balzano, Anna Marie de la Fuente, Thania Garcia, Alex Gonzalez, John Hopewell, Carole Horst, Lily Moayeri*

The dynamic executives and creatives on *Variety*'s Miami Entertainment Impact list will be celebrated April 13 at the Miami Entertainment Town event, presented by City National Bank

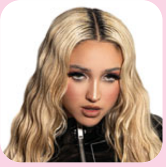
Manuel Abud
CEO
The Latin Recording Academy

Abud's appreciation for Miami is multi-layered. The Latin entertainment and business exec has lived there for the past decade, as it's the only other place in the world he's spent the most time in besides his home country of Mexico. He credits the city's vastly diverse and expanding entertainment network for the Academy's international expansion in Mexico, Brazil and Spain. "The Latin Recording Academy is a global organization and, just like me, it has made Miami its home for the past decade because we believe it is a city that truly reflects the global and inclusive character of our organization. Part of [our] evolution means international expansion in order to fully support music creators around the world, not only in a particular region."

Nelson Albareda
CEO
Loud and Live

Within the last 14-month period, independently owned global entertainment and live events company Loud and Live presented over 400 shows under the leadership of Albareda — with 20% of those shows produced in Miami. Coming out of the pandemic, the industry-wide challenges of inflation and venue availability in the live entertainment space were anticipated by Loud and Live, who "came out of the gate swinging with offers and tours" and ready to meet the "significant pent-up customer demand," according to Albareda. "We're looking to diversify the type and genre of artists we work with and continue to grow our global market share as a leading live entertainment promoter, including continued expansion into Latin America and Europe."

> **"My career all started because of people I met in this city."**
> **— Mariah Angeliq**



Mariah Angeliq
Artist

Born and raised in Miami, Angeliq launched her career when she was 16 as a trap artist. But as the boisterous energy of the city caught up to the rising star, Angeliq found her voice in urban music and she went on to cultivate a steady stream of chart-topping collaborations, from "Bobo" with Bad Gyal and Maria Becerra to "El Makinon" with label mate Karol G. "Miami has become the place to be if you want to become an artist," she says. "My career all started because of the people I met in this city. Even though I wasn't fluent in Spanish when I started, I was empowered by being a Spanglish artist."

Javiera Balmaceda
Head of Local Originals for Latin America, Canada and Australia
Amazon Studios

Balmaceda believes her purpose as the head of Amazon Studios' original content is to show "the greatness of all Latin American storytelling." Balmaceda led teams in seven countries with more than 30 projects launched in 2022, including the critically acclaimed "Argentina, 1985," which won a Golden Globe and received an Oscar nomination. "I felt that not only is it relevant to Latin American history, but today, it really exempli-

Angeliq: @mastermindfoto; Abud: Omar Cruz

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fies the fragility of democracy and the work that we can all do for justice, within the confines of the systems that we have," she says, in reference to the film's success. Balmaceda wants to continue to find stories that resonate with Amazon's customers in Latin America and "that break out into the global footprint."

Edgar Barrera
Founder
BorderKid Records

As the producer and composer for countless major artists including Ariana Grande, Christina Aguilera, Grupo Firme, Maluma and Becky G, he's one of Miami's most in-demand producers these days. "My career has taken over a big chunk of my daily life, so at this point my biggest personal goal is to find a new balance," he says. Barrera will also have to find time for his BorderKid label too. "For sure my biggest challenge [recently] was launching my new label," he says. "There was so much I had to learn but I surrounded myself with very knowledgeable people that have supported me from day one." The Grammy-winner's advice for up-and-comers in the industry? "Remain authentic to your sound. Authenticity is more valuable than any other trend happening at the moment."

Ana Bond
Senior VP and Managing Director,
International Productions,
Latin America and U.S. Hispanic
Sony Pictures Television

With Bond's leadership at Sony Pictures Television, the company has produced shows such as "Ligeramente Diva," the Spanish-language adaptation of "Drop Dead Diva," as well as "De Brutas Nada" for Amazon Prime Video and "Dona Beija" for HBO Max, while also taking a first dip into scripted reality with shows such as "Clinica X." Bond also oversees what the company refers to as "light drama," which she says there is always an appetite for, as well as comedies. "We have the best team that we can have surrounding each one of those titles, whether it be in front of or behind the camera."

Camila Cabello
Artist

In the year since releasing her critically acclaimed third studio album "Familia," Cabello has kept busy. Between appearances on NBC's hit "The Voice," and prepping for her voice role as Viva in animated franchise "Trolls Band Together," she launched an ASMR sleep story as part of a partnership with leading mental health brand Calm. Plus, she's also been supporting the launch of her grandmother Mercedes Rodriguez's novel, "Los Boleros Que He Vivido."

> **"Remain authentic to your sound. Authenticity is more valuable than any other trend happening at the moment." — Edgar Barrera**

Gabrielle Mella
Marketing Director
Andrea Galicia
Marketing/Sales Director
Empire

Mella and Galicia have worked together to launch and develop the global careers of artists like Immasoul. The duo are always on the lookout for fresh sounds and faces — with an emphasis on bringing more women into the industry. "There are so many female producers, engineers, singer-songwriters and managers that are not given the opportunity to shine. Women have had to be aggressive for too long in a male-dominated music industry. It's time to really support each other instead of bringing each other down," says Galicia. "The dream is always to find the next superstar. I hope that in the next year our artists achieve global recognition," adds Mella.

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Barrera: Mario Alzate; Cabello: Christine Hahn

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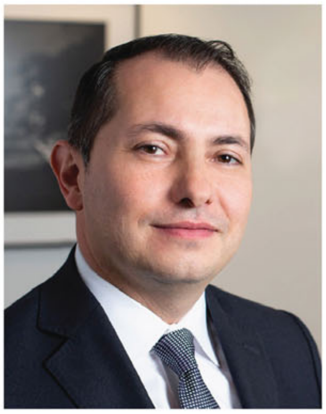
Including our very own **Rodrigo Nieto-Galvis**.



Rodrigo Nieto-Galvis
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Brittany Flores
Florida Region President
Live Nation

Flores thinks there's still mountains of untapped potential to be discovered in Miami. "Other cities like L.A., New York, Nashville and Austin can be seen as where you need to go to have a career in music, but there is so much opportunity to work with students here," she says, adding that her next big career goal is to "create an accelerator program for students interested in working in the live entertainment industry." In the last year, Flores helped put together the Jazz in the Gardens festival in partnership with the city of Miami Gardens to host headliners Mary J. Blige, H.E.R., Rick Ross, the Isley Brothers, SWV and the Roots. "It's important we are always ensuring the live events we put on are reflective of what this market looks like, listens to, and that it's the artists they want to see live."

Bruno del Granado
Head of the Miami Office
CAA

CAA's Miami office toppe represents globally known performers including Ricky Martin, Gloria Estefan and Luis Fonsi, among others. Recent successes include securing a casting for comedian Marcello Hernandez on "SNL," only the fourth Latino ever to permanently join the show, and spearheading negotiations for Estefan's casting in the recent "Father of the Bride" remake through Plan B/Warner Bros. In addition to anticipating signing more clients over the coming year, he would also like "more cross-collaboration with K-Pop and Afro Beat artists since those two genres — along with Latin — are breaking musical boundaries globally."

David Grutman
Founder
Groot Hospitality

Grutman began merging entertainment and hospitality way before owning Instagrammable restaurants was cool in Miami. Grutman, who opened the game-changing LIV 15 years ago and counts the hot eatery Komodo as part of his portfolio, has shifted the hospitality scene in Miami, encouraging A-listers to open unique dining concepts in the city. In partnership with Bad Bunny, Grutman launched Gekkō in 2022. "Bunny always wanted to do a sushi restaurant, so when this opportunity came up, I did say 'Hey, listen, I think I have the most perfect one for you,' and it worked out," Grutman says. Grutman is opening Casadonna, an Italian concept, with TAO Group this summer.

El Guincho
Artist

El Guincho (born Pablo Díaz-Reixa) may have been born in Spain, but the artist, songwriter and producer is now all about Miami. "Settling in Miami after many years of working in Barcelona was probably not only my biggest challenge, but my biggest success over this past year … it's been really great for me and I wish I had done it earlier," he says. Nominated for a Latin Grammy for his work on "La Fama" by Rosalía this past year, he is a close collaborator of the artist, co-producing multiple tracks on her lauded album "Motomami." He's worked with everyone from FKA Twigs to Travis Scott to Bjork, so expect big looks soon from the songsmith. "I'm currently working on some of my dream projects, and I'm excited for when some of the major collaborations I've been working on can be released," he says.

CLOUD9
MATEO

NBCUniversal's Albertina Marfil oversaw the Mexican format adaptation of of hit "Superstore."

> **"Settling in Miami after many years of working in Barcelona was probably not only my biggest challenge, but my biggest success over this past year." — El Guincho**

Dionne Bermudez
VP, Product Strategy, Latin America
Jesus Rodriguez
VP, Global Curation/Merchandising
HBO Max

Launching HBO Max in Latin America during a corporate merger and restructuring was a big challenge for Bermudez, who leads the product experience team in shaping the app experience across all major platforms in Latin America, and Rodriguez, who oversees HBO Max Latin America's editorial strategy. "Our local product team was able to intimately partner with local business groups, allowing us to successfully launch specific but essential market features for our consumers," says Bermudez. As for programming, Rodriguez notes that much care was given to "enhancing the overall value proposition for our consumers by embracing local preferences and scaling up on local original productions [and] content acquisitions. The significant increase in content investment allowed us to create a new narrative with fans, without jeopardizing the long-term business."

Grutman: Mary Beth Koeth; Superstore: Greg Gayne/NBC; Guincho: Electric Feel Entertainment

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Paula Kaminsky
Managing Director
GTS

Over the past three years, Kaminsky, as Sebastián Yatra's manager, has helped spearhead important milestones in the artist's career. From singing the 2022 Oscar-nominated "Dos Oruguitos" from "Encanto" (and performing on the Oscar show) to his debut as a lead actor on Netflix's "Erase Una Vez Pero No," Kaminsky has been there. "On the management side, my vision is that you need to develop an artist long-term," says Kaminsky. "It's harder because the market [today] is very fast. In the case of Sebastián, I think we're working amazingly because he is very open to discussing all of these ideas. We bring opportunities to him and he's always open to deliver."

Nestor Casonú
President, Latin America
Leslie Ahrens
Senior VP, Creative, Latin America
Kobalt

Kobalt's Latin office may be the proverbial new kid of the block in Miami (they opened their office just eight years ago), but they have quickly made their presence in the city known, with many awards already under their belt, including 51 Latin Grammy Award wins. "My proudest moment in the last year would be seeing the awards our clients have received and the recognition executives of my staff have received for their contribution to the industry," he says. Casonú recently oversaw the contract renewal for chart-topper Karol G, coinciding with the artist's recent back-to-back hits, "Provenza" and "MAMIII" (with Becky G). Ahrens was also involved with Karol G's creative process the last year, and she additionally has worked with top Latin singer-songwriter Justin Quiles, as well as helping to renew songwriter/producer Ovy on the Drums' (Karol G's go-to producer) deal at Kobalt.

Sebastián Yatra sings Oscar-nominated "Dos Oruguitas" from "Encanto" at the 2022 Oscar broadcast.

> **"It's currently a boom time for original content as much as it is for international adaptations, which excites me." — Albertina Marfil**

Walter Kolm
Founder/CEO
WK Entertainment
Founder/Owner
WK Records/WKMX

Client roster success stories include Maluma starring in a feature film while also launching his own mezcal brand, a fragrance, a clothing line and earning a Grammy nomination. Carlos Vives' release of "Cumbiana II" led to Grammy and Latin Grammy nominations and a casting in the Disney Plus series "The Low Tone Club" featuring his own songs. Kolm notes that as a company, "our biggest successes also came with some of our biggest challenges" but that perseverance paid off. Looking ahead, Kolm plans to grow the company and help clients and staff create and surpass their own objectives as well.

Miguel Lua
Managing Partner, Maluma
WK Entertainment

A key player in Maluma's career, Lua has been instrumental in creative decision-making and deal-closing for the Colombian talent's major events, including his homecoming 360 concert "Medallo en El Mapa" for 50,000 fans with surprise appearances by Madonna and Grupo Firme, and his starring role in "Marry Me" opposite Jennifer Lopez. Lua guided Maluma in the launch of his own mezcal brand, fragrance, clothing line, production company, their joint venture Royalty Records and closed 2022 with a Nicki Minaj and Myriam Fares collaboration for the official FIFA World Cup Anthem. Goals for 2023? "Continue seeking major general market collaborations for Maluma and actively conversing with major Hollywood motion picture studios to land his next major acting role."

Albertina Marfil
Director, Format Sales and Production
NBCUniversal Formats

Marfil had success with the Mexican adaptation of NBC hit "Superstore," and is currently leading the adaptation of the series "That's My Jam." Through partnerships she has fostered between NBCUniversal Formats and Telemundo, Marfil will oversee the second series of "Top Chef VIP," while shepherding a Turkish version of "New Amsterdam." "There's always going to be an element of risk with bringing formats out to new markets, but it feels so magical when you do indeed find a format that truly resonates with new and local audiences," she says. "It's currently a boom time for original content as much as it is for international adaptations, which excites me."

Yatra: Neilson Barnard/Getty Images

The Orchard

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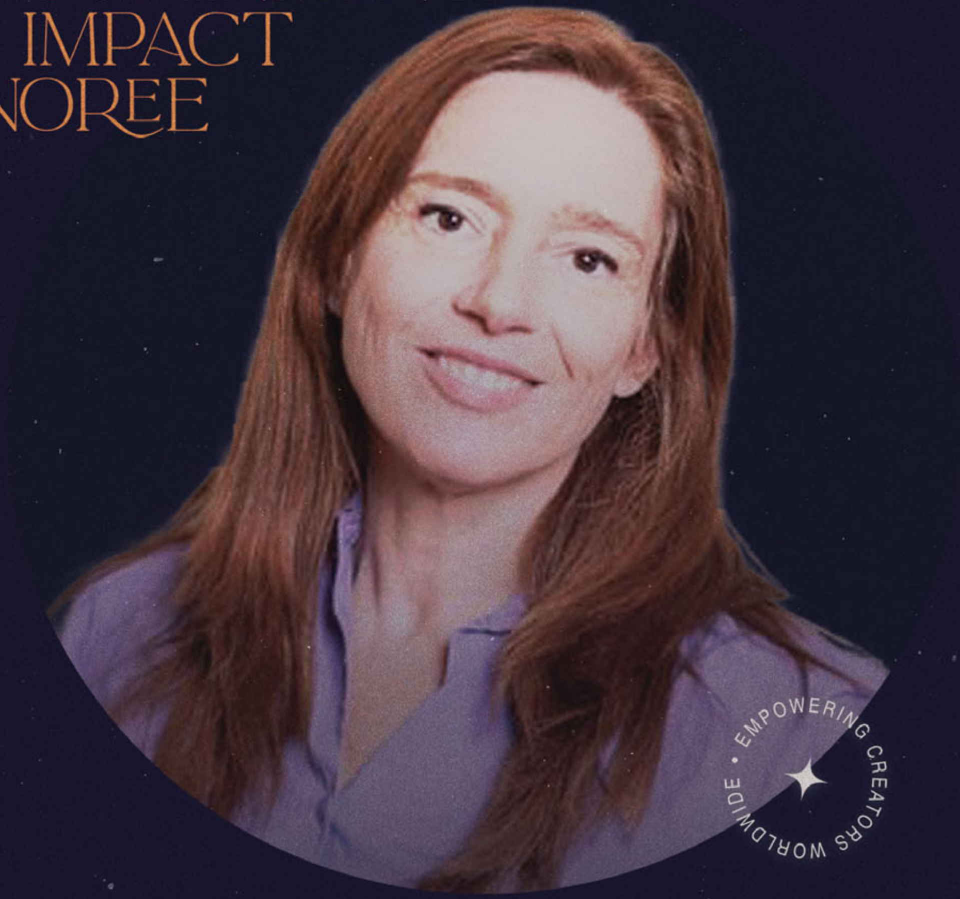
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Fernando Medin
President/Managing Director
Discovery Networks Latin America/
U.S. Hispanic

While Warner Bros. Discovery is on track to launch the merged HBO Max Discovery+ streaming service in Latin America before the end of 2023, WBD is also fully "committed" to combining global U.S. content with "extremely compelling IP created locally" in Latin America, says Medin. "Latin America has several qualities that make it a territory of enormous potential: from the adoption and consolidation of streaming, to the still-healthy linear business, to the booming gaming segment and the comeback of the theatrical business; despite the local crises typical of each territory, going to the movies and consuming home entertainment continues to be an economic outlet for the population."

Gustavo Menéndez
President, U.S. Latin and Latin America
Warner Chappell Music

Warner Chappell's recent announcement of strong quarterly results is, in part, driven by the standout year Menéndez's team had with new signings of top-tier talent and the continued development of its roster of legendary and current hitmakers. Last year, Menéndez was awarded the Ralph S. Peer Publisher Award at the Latin Songwriters Hall of Fame, but what he really wants is "my own Bizarrap session!" He notes: "We've seen artists break through at an incredible pace. This is happening not only in urban music, but also in new regional Mexican subgenres. Our challenge has been to adapt and react to the speed that the business is moving, without losing sight of our strategy."

Ignacio Meyer
President, U.S. Networks
TelevisaUnivision

Meyer steers TelevisaUnivision's business expansion, helping to integrate his U.S.-based team with the content and operations teams in Mexico. Based in Miami, Meyer's 20-plus years in media and music informs his strategic promotion of the company's portfolio of brands, including Univision, UNIMÁS, Galavisión and TUDN. Describing 2022 a "transformative" year, he says: "We faced a shift in the audience composition, a decline in television viewers and rapid adoption of internet-connected devices while going through a historic combination of two market-leading companies, Univision Communications Inc. and Televisa, and launching ViX, the Spanish-language streaming service. This transformation was an opportunity to evolve our business from a domestic broadcast network to a global content organization to serve nearly 600 million Spanish-speaking customers around the world, and we did it seamlessly without continuity issues."

> **"We know that our audiences are multifaceted. We lean into their vast preferences, their diversity." — Monica Gil**

Telemundo scored big ratings with the 2022 World Cup, which saw Argentina win the tournament.

Beau Ferrari
Chairman, NBCUniversal
Telemundo Enterprises
Karen Barroeta
Exec VP, Production and Development,
Telemundo Global Studios
Ronald Day
President, Entertainment and
Content Strategy
Monica Gil
Chief Administrative and Marketing Officer
Eli Velazquez
EVP, Sports Content, Telemundo Deportes
NBCUniversal Telemundo Enterprises

NBCUniversal Telemundo continues to increase its audience reach, and its top execs have renovated and re-evaluated the strategy for the network. "With the pandemic being behind us, we searched for new opportunities and formats that were not only fit for TV, but that could also be available across our many platforms," explains Day, who leads the company's content strategy with a particular focus on daily entertainment and in collaboration with Telemundo Global Studios, network news and sports. "We've brought two new reality shows and we are preparing another two productions for 2024. We plan to continue with the success of 'La Casa de Los Famosos,' 'Top Chef' and more projects that are on the way" he adds. Further investing in production, the network inaugurated its Telemundo Global Studios in Mexico City, with Barroeta leading in the execution of the project and the production of series, including the network's release of the eighth season of "El Señor de los Cielos," which the network brought back by popular demand. "In understanding the Latino audience in the United States,

Meyer: Univision TV Networks Group; Ferrai: Aaron Davidson/Telemundo/Getty Images; Barroeta: Dia Dipasupil/Getty Images; Day: Alexander Tamargo/Getty Images; Gil: Jereé Seeley/Äremi;
Velazquez: Joe Kohen/WireImage; Messi: Ian MacNicol/Getty Images

Congratulations

TO OUR HONOREES

Afo Verde
Alex Gallardo
María Fernández
Rafa Arcaute & Bruno Duarte

Édgar Barrera
Romeo Santos

Variety's 2023 Miami Impact Report

SONY MUSIC | LATIN-IBERIA

what they are watching and why, we create characters who have those same virtues and that excite our viewers," says Barroeta. In sports, Telemundo — which Ferrari referred to as a "growth engine" — also recently hit record numbers. "From a production standpoint, the World Cup was our biggest execution ever," says Velasquez, who leads the network's sports division. "We delivered 2,000+ hours of programming across Telemundo, Universo, Peacock and digital," he adds. "As the No. 1 producer of original Hispanic content in the U.S., we know that our audiences are multifaceted. We lean into their vast preferences, their diversity and the many ways in which they consume content to develop and share scripted and unscripted narratives that embody the Latino of today," notes Gil. Goals for 2023? "To continue to build on our position as a leading producer and innovator of content across platforms, regardless of language. And by doing so build on our growth trajectory as a leader in media regardless of language," says Ferarri.

Lex Borrero
Co-Founder

Tainy
Co-Founder, Producer
NEON16

Entrepreneur Borrero and his superproducer client Tainy (Bad Bunny, J Balvin) launched Neon16 in Miami two years ago as an artist incubator. Since then, they have expanded into publishing with 22 Publishing in partnership with Sony. More recently, they started the content company Ntertain, producers of the docuseries "Los Montaner" on Disney+, and the music competition show "La Firma" on Netflix. Borrero takes his business cues from Jay-Z and Sean "Puffy" Combs, looking to push Latin culture everywhere possible: film, television, advertising and gaming—for a start. "We want to have a No. 1 album, No. 1 song and a No. 1 TV show," say the duo.

Rodrigo Nieto-Galvis
Entertainment Banking Team Leader
CN Bank Miami

Nieto-Galvis opened City National Bank's Miami office in 2019, and today, his team works with Latin musicians, songwriters, producers and business managers as well as other entities in the Latin entertainment industry. Through the pandemic, he helped clients build online business, and uses City National's subsidiary, Exactuals, to aid in royalty collection and tracking — a plus for clients based internationally. "CNB opened an office in Miami to support the Latin Entertainment Industry holistically," he says. "The rapid growth and global popularity of the Latin Music Industry and TV content has increased the financial complexities experienced by Latin entertainers and producers. CNB has been supporting these Latin entrepreneurs with financial solutions and financial education to manage their global operations."

Mia Nygren
General Manager, Latin America
Spotify

Nygren is a believer in "hard focus, prioritization and by doing less you can achieve more." This philosophy is working for Nygren, who has seen double-digit growth in all markets, across all metrics for the regions she oversees. She credits her "very passionate and dedicated team" for this achievement, particularly highlighting their delivery of "innovative initiatives." She notes that "2022 was a year of macro challenges that shook the landscape. This new reality needed a shift in focus and prioritization. It's inspiring to see how streaming continues to lead the way for growth in music consumption and revenues."

> **"We want to have a No. 1 album, No. 1 song and a No. 1 TV show." — Lex Borrero and Tainy**

Tefi Pessoa
Creator
hellotefi

The MTV "Merch Masters" host has been busy solidifying partnerships with brands including Milk Makeup, YSL Beauty, DKNY, W Hotels and Uber, among others. She is also InStyle Magazine's exclusive Tik Tok host and was named a Latinx Agent of Change for People en Español. Upcoming projects include a podcast, a book and additional hosting opportunities. Pessoa credits her successes to "delusion. Absolute and total self-deception, in the best way." The UTA client counts 1.6 million TikTok followers. Some hoped-for future collaborators include Salma Hayek, Gloria Estefan and Selena Gomez.

Lex Borrero and Tainy's Ntertain produces doc series "Los Montaner."

Pessoa: Jonny Marlow; Hair: Mashal Afzalzada; Makeup: Carly Fisher; Styling: Mikiel Benyamin; Tainy: Neon16; Nygren: Nick Garcia; Los Montaner: Disney+

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Ivy Queen
Artist

The singer has been running the game for nearly three decades, and as pop music heads toward languageless territory, she's just getting started 20 years after the release of her breakthrough hit, "Quiero Bailar." "Through lyrics, I encouraged other Latinas that stand around me to stand for themselves and also to not stay quiet when something hurts," she said recently. Lately, she's been gathering well-deserved accolades and tributes from stars such as Bad Bunny. Today, she still shatters barriers with women-empowering hits like her iLe collaboration "Algo Bonito," and continues to send a message of unity among her peers.

AJ Ramos
Head of Artist Partnerships,
U.S. & Latin America
YouTube

Ramos has worked closely with artists like Feid, Daddy Yankee, Maverick City, Young Miko and Grupo Marca Registrada on their shorts and other YouTube content. He has also supported the YouTube Songwriters Program Credits playlists with such heavy-hitting Miami songwriters and producers as Foreign Teck, Elena Rose, Edgar Barrera and Tainy. He was involved with Camilo's "Puerta de Alcalá" livestream from Madrid, Spain, as well. Throughout all his endeavors, Ramos makes sure that "we remain authentic and protect Latin music and culture, giving visibility and a voice to artists who represent the entire spectrum of our culture and genres." Goals for 2023 include "Creating more community, mentoring and pushing our culture forward from the streets to the C-Suites."

Romeo Santos earned his fourth top 10 album and has been busy touring the U.S. and Latin America.

> **"Through lyrics, I encouraged other Latinas that stand around me to stand for themselves and also not to stay quiet when something hurts." — Queen Ivy**

Billy Corben
Director

Alfred Spellman
Producer
Rakontur

As two kids who grew up in Miami, Corben and Spellman have built a career documenting and telling some of the city's most infamous stories. Their hit "Cocaine Cowboys: Kings of Miami," earned them an Edward R. Murrow Award in 2022. "It was nice to get recognized for our journalism because, at the end of the day, our work is somewhat of a hybrid," says Spellman. The duo's company, Rakontur, also produced Hulu's hit "God Forbid: The Sex Scandal That Brought Down a Dynasty," about the downfall evangelical leader Jerry Falwell Jr. "We're always in service of the truth, obviously in nonfiction filmmaking but we do have, I believe, an obligation to the audience to entertain them," says Corben.

John Rossiter
EVP, Distribution and Networks,
Latin America
Sony Pictures Entertainment

Rossiter oversees Sony Pictures Television's international production, TV distribution, networks and home entertainment for Latin America. "The next few years, we've got a couple of pillars around lighter drama, comedies, melodramas as being kind of a sweet spot of where to go," he says, responding to audience demand. Under his leadership, SPE debuted Sony Movies, and also focused on the growth of the company's Spanish-language FAST channels. "While everybody else concentrated on streaming, we were able to launch a show, or launch a channel in the more traditional space," he notes.

Romeo Santos
Artist

Santos was surprised with how easy it was to find his groove in Miami. "I've written some interesting tunes in Florida and [that] has been motivating to explore," he says before making the sly disclaimer that he'll "always be a New Yorker at heart." With the release of "Fórmula, Vol. 3," the third installment of a series he launched in 2011 with his solo debut, Santos achieved his fourth top 10-charting album and has since been busy on stadium stops across the U.S. and Latin America. Often considered the King of Bachata music to his millions of listeners, Santos thinks the genre still has more life to give. "To hear new rhythms, and fresh flows, and seeing many cross into other genres unapologetically has helped genres like bachata. It's sort of stimulating for me to stay on my 'A' game and continue to reinvent myself."

Ivy Queen: Manny Hernandez/Wireimage/Getty Images; Santos Preforming: John Sciulli/Getty Images for Tidal; Spellman: Manny Hernandez/Wireimage/Getty Images; Santos: Ernie Rodriguez

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TO OUR CHAIRMAN
AND CEO
RAÚL ALARCÓN
RECIPIENT OF THE
LEGEND AND
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sbs

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Universal Music Latin superstar Karol G electrified crowds at her March concert in Puerto Rico.

Afo Verde
Chairman and CEO,
Sony Music Latin-Iberia

Maria Fernandez
COO and EVP, Sony Music Latin-Iberia

Alex Gallardo
President, Sony Music Entertainment,
U.S. Latin

Rafa Arcaute
Co-President, 5020 Records

Bruno Duarte
Co-President, 5020 Records
Sony Music

Maluma, Becky G, Christina Aguilera, Jennifer Lopez and Romeo Santos are some of the stars in the Sony Music constellation. Fernandez has steadily risen through the Sony ranks, landing her role in 2018 and continuing to help keep the org moving upward. Arcaute and Duarte oversee 5020 Records, which launched last year with artists including Residente, Kany García, Tini and Beéle. Tini's "Cupido" debuted at No. 2 on the Spotify global chart. Gallardo has signed such hitmakers as Rauw Alejandro, Ozuna, Anuel and Natti Natasha. "We don't consider ourselves a traditional record label," Gallardo says. "Our goal is to develop careers, and we work in the shadows for our roster to shine. I'm just another member of the team who's passionate, believes in the artists, and does everything I can to support their success."

Laura Tesoriero
Exec VP, Latin
The Orchard

With almost 20 years at the Orchard, Tesoriero has the longest tenure of any female executive at the company. She closed 2022 with 25% of the U.S. Latin market share. She also brokered deals with Bizarrap, Duki and Harry Nach while Bad Bunny scored with career-high chart positions in 15 global markets and maintained his status as the most-streamed artist in the world. "My colleague Albert Torres relocated from Barcelona to help create a bigger presence for the Orchard in [the newly opened] Miami office, which is now the hub for the company's Latin music business," she says.

> **"I think Miami is a city that's known for work hard, play hard and I want that to come across in my content." — Vivian Tu**

Myke Towers
Artist

Puerto Rican rapper Towers dubs Miami "the Latin Hollywood." Last month, Towers released his fourth album, "La Vida Es Una," which features him experimenting with a multitude of sounds. Over 23 dance-ready tracks, Towers offers his spin on dancehall and pop-house, and of course, his signature brand of hip-hop-infused reggaeton. "It is the end product of a careful selection of over 50 songs I recorded [over] the last two years," says Towers of "La Vida Es Una." "My biggest challenge was to make different music without losing my essence and staying relevant between all the new artists out there."

Vivian Tu
Founder/CEO
Your Rich BFF Media

Tu says her career as an online content creator began out of pure coincidence. After leaving her Wall Street job in 2018, where she "helped rich people get richer," she started a media job. However, an influx of colleagues asking for personal finance advice inspired her to make videos and put them on her social media account, @myrichbff. "The very first video I made went viral and I had 100,000 followers by the end of the week, which I recognized as a completely not normal, creator experience," says Tu, who now has 1.5 million followers on Instagram. Tu is launching a podcast this year and plans to release a book in 2024. Currently living in Miami, she plans to diversify her content so followers of all generations can make smarter financial decisions. "I think Miami is a city that's known for work hard, play hard and I want that to come across in my content."

Carol G: Gladys Vega/ Getty Images; Towers: Marilyn Tan; Gallardo: Alessandro Martino; Arcaute, Durante: Diego Cadavid (2)

EMPIRE CONGRATULATES

ANDREA GALICIA

GABRIELLE MELLA

VARIETY'S MIAMI ENTERTAINMENT

IMPACT REPORT

EMPIRE

Jesús López
Chairman/CEO, Universal Music Latin América & Iberian Peninsula
Aldo Gonzalez
Senior VP, A&R, Universal Music Latino
Universal Music Group

Universal Music Latino kicked off 2023 making history with Karol G's "Mañana Será Bonito" becoming the first all-Spanish-language record by a female artist to hit No. 1 in the U.S. "All songs are special but the one that stands out for me is 'Mientras Me Curo del Cora,'" says Gonzalez of the record he helped shepherd. "Though Karol is known for her trademark rhythmic urban anthems, it's remarkable that this slower tempo record is among one of the most streamed songs in the album." Adds Lopez, "Music is always in a state of evolution, and for that to happen in Latin music, we need to facilitate and embrace cross pollination. The demographics of the consumers of Latin music are now first, second and even third generation Latin-Americans who are bi-cultural and bilingual."

Alexandra Lioutikoff
President, Latin America and U.S. Latin
Ana Rosa Santiago
Senior VP, Latin Music
Universal Music Publishing Group

In addition to Bad Bunny's "surreal" global success, UMG's Latin publishing team has been riding high off the breakthrough year of another urban music star — Colombia's Feid. "The last few years have seen the growth of artists, producers, and songwriters from all over the world coming together in Miami to work," says Santiago. "It's something you can feel here," echoes Lioutikoff, whose time in the city spans stints with Disney, ASCAP and now UMPG. "I've been fortunate enough to watch Miami grow into the center of the Latin music business and for good reason," she says. As for what's on the horizon? "Music from Africa is finally getting recognized globally and Latin rhythms and collaborations can complement it," says Lioutikoff. "Equally, one region I think really stands out is Brazil — it's so diverse and bursting at the seams with different indigenous types of great music."

Alejandro Duque
President, Warner Music Latin America
Roberto Andrade
Managing Director, Warner Music Latina
Aton Ben-Horin
Global VP of A&R, Warner Music Group; Owner, Plush Recording Studios; CEO, Plush Management; Founding Partner & Producer, the Agency
Warner Music Group

Duque oversees WM Latina as well as Warner's offices across Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru. This past year, Anitta, Blessd, Danny Ocean, Paulo Londra and Tiago PZK, stormed the charts. At one point, Duque's roster occupied both the global Spotify No. 1 (Anitta) and No. 2 (Paulo Londra) spots. Andrade has worked alongside Duque in putting a new structure in place to help break artists across borders more quickly and has helped accelerate the label's vision to be a truly artist-first label with a globalized approach to artist development. Warner Music Latina boasts Sebastián Yatra, Carlos Vives, Elena Rose, Ovy on the Drums and Maldy, among others. "We're delighted that we have managed to build a roster of big stars in each of our Latin markets that we're looking forward to breaking regionally and globally," says Duque. "In Colombia, we're excited about Blessd, who also had a global Top 50 song with 'Medallo.' In Mexico, we signed Yng Lucas and his debut single 'La Bebe (Remix)' has skyrocketed to the global Top 10 in under a week!" Ben-Horin's management roster includes JVKE, Johnny Goldstein, Carl Falk, Jesse Saint John and Jakke Erixson.

"Music from Africa is finally getting recognized globally and Latin rhythms and collaborations can complement it." — Alexandra Lioutikoff

Xplicit
Artist

Xplicit's songwriting career was already in high gear the last few years, but 2023 sees the hitmaker poised to level up. "A major success for me the past year was identifying my new publishing partner for this next phase of my career, I am confident I have found that in Katie Welle and Sony," he says of his new A&R and publishing deal, which he signed in late 2022 (he also signed with Electric Feel for management last year). This year, the Miami based, Grammy-award winning songwriter has already landed a co-write ("Had It") on Morgan Wallen's latest album and also a cut ("Sleepwalker") on Ava Max's new LP. The Florida native is also bullish on Miami's growing role in the music industry. "The vibe is amazing [here] as it's becoming a creative hub once again," he says of the city.

Sebastián Yatra
Artist

Yatra recalls dreaming of winning a Grammy as a kid, and in 2022, it came true. His third studio album, "Dharma," scored two Latin Grammys for pop vocal album and his No.1 hit "Tacones Rojos" won for pop song. He also earned a Latin pop album Grammy nom for "Dharma." "You later realize that it's not even about winning the award. Everything that got me to that point gave me a lot of life lessons that help me see that it is much more about having a purpose," says Yatra. When it comes to reinventing himself, Yatra believes that staying in constant motion is key. "The challenge is to be constantly creating and when you stay vibrating in that space, where it's all about creation, I think that you can have a long career," he adds.

Gonzalez: Rodin Eckenroth/Getty Images; Ben-Horin: Mike Tran for Billboard; Xplicit: Electric Feel Entertainment; Yatra: Erick Fernando

↑ The Jills Zeder Group reps 3305 S. Moorings Way in the enclave of the Moorings in Coconut Grove.

Richard Novak/The Jills Zeder Group

Buyers Go Nuts for Coconut Grove

Home values soar and developers help reinvent Miami's bayside enclave

• *By Kathy A. McDonald*

Once bohemian and artsy, the leafy bayside enclave of Miami's Coconut Grove has gone decidedly upscale. In 2022, the suburb was home to Miami's priciest residential real estate transaction when entrepreneur and Citadel CEO Ken Griffin paid $106 million for two mansions on a combined lot with expansive bayfront frontage and unobstructed views. Jill Hertzberg of the Jills Zeder Group at Coldwell Banker Realty, who represented Griffin, describes the 4-acre estate as akin to a Picasso and “priceless.”

The pandemic accelerated the Grove's popularity, attracting transplants from New York, Chicago (such as Griffin) and California due to its proximity to all things great about Miami — including well-regarded private schools, a relatively quick drive to downtown, sophisticated dining, bayside parks and the revitalized Dinner Key pleasure boat marina. According to One Sotheby's Intl. Realty's February Florida East Coast Market Report, median single-family-home prices in Coconut Grove were up 43.5% year-over-year.

“I personally believe Coconut Grove is one of the most sought-after neighborhoods in the entire country,” says David Martin, CEO of Terra, the development company behind three architecturally distinguished, residential projects along Bayshore Drive: the Grove at Grand Bay (96 residences in two towers), Park Grove (designed by Rem Koolhaas/OMA) and the Mr. C Residences (231 residences in two, 21-story, Arquitectonica-designed towers, which sold out before completion). Each is sited to take advantage of views of nearby Biscayne Bay in the highly walkable neighborhood. Upcoming for Terra is Grove Central, a mixed-use development with 402 apartments adjacent to the Metrorail on Coconut Grove's northern border.

“People feel a sense of place and community here. It's a neighborhood where people can plant a flag,” Martin says, noting the appeal to families.

Liz Hogan, vice president of luxury sales at Compass Florida, also sees the Grove's ongoing evolution as a younger demographic moves in.

“People who relocated love the proximity to the water,” she says, although demand far outstrips supply of waterfront homes. The plentiful Florida live oaks and other mature trees of the Grove's lush canopy add to the tropical vibe.

“You can have the most incredible standard of living in the Grove, plus the real estate value's always going up — it's an extraordinary place,” Hertzberg says.

Hogan says the area has really taken off post-pandemic, with agents constantly searching for available condo units and competitive selling scenarios for turnkey, single-family homes. Her sale in summer 2022 of Christian Slater's Spanish Revival-style, three-bedroom, 2½-bath home with guesthouse, on one of the Grove's coveted side streets, garnered multiple offers and sold in one day above asking at $4.26 million. While pricing per foot varies, currently buyers can expect to pay between $1,150 per sq.-ft. and $1,200 per sq.-ft. for new construction.

Complementing the residential boom is the ongoing remake of Coconut Grove's main retail and dining district. Among the major efforts: a complete remodel of the dated, 1990-built CocoWalk outdoor shopping mall with a new look, stylish tenants and an office building. The city of Miami, in partnership with private developers and $10 million in FEMA funds granted in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, recently oversaw a $70 million renovation of the waterfront Dinner Key Marina, replacing longtime tenants and warehouses with the sleek new Bayshore Club bar and grill, a broad esplanade and new boat docks with more restaurants and retail to come. On Florida Avenue, the $50 million renovation of the 179-room Mayfair House Hotel & Garden included a trendy rooftop bar and updated rooms, and the brought the Gaudi-inspired hotel back to life.

Vita on Grove Isle, made up of 65-ultra luxury residences on a private island, topped by 12 duplex-style, Biscayne Bay-facing penthouses (pricing starts at $12 million for penthouses) is expected to see its groundbreaking in April. The curving, seven-story edifice promises highest-end finishes, impressive Biscayne Bay water views and a boutique feel, says Christine Martinez de Castro, vice president marketing and sales, CMC Group, the developer of the project and the nearby Grovenor House (166 units on 32 floors).

“The appeal of Coconut Grove has always been there,” she says. “Now we're gaining national attention.”

Raúl Alarcón Doubles Down on Radio

Variety's Legends & Groundbreakers honoree leads Spanish Broadcasting System to new highs in its 40th year ● *By Roy Trakin*

When *Variety* chose to honor Spanish Broadcasting System (SBS) founder Raúl Alarcón with its Legends & Groundbreakers Award at its Miami Entertainment Town event on April 13, it picked the perfect person to fit that definition.

Among SBS' 22 stations in the leading eight Latin markets are New York's WSKQ-FM (Mega 97.9), the most-listened-to and streamed outlet in the U.S. in any language, Miami's No. 1 station WXDJ-FM (El Nuevo Zol 106.7) and WCMQ-FM (Zeta 92.3) as well as L.A.'s top-ranked KXOL-FM (Mega 96.3) and KLAX-FM (97.9 La Raza), the first FM station to program regional Mexican music such as Norteñas and Banda, which once famously beat out an incredulous Howard Stern in morning ratings on KLSX.

"I'm absolutely honored *Variety* would think of me in those terms," says Alarcón, the chairman/CEO of the largest Hispanic-owned Spanish-language radio chain in the U.S., founded with his father in 1983. "When you do something for 40 years, people tend to remember who you are and what you've done."

In fact, Alarcón was born to the business. His late father, Pablo Raúl Alarcón, started his first radio network in Camagüey, Cuba, where he had been a local disc jockey spinning records since high school.

"He loved being on the air," says Alarcón. "It was his life's passion."

When he was four years old, Alarcón's family became "political refugees" from the embattled island in 1960 after his father's station was "intervened," taken over by the government headed by Fidel Castro following the overthrow of the U.S.-allied military dictator, Fulgencio Batista.

→
Raúl Alarcón launched SBS with his father with one station in New York.

Nick Garcia

"Castro always insisted, even in meetings with [then-U.S. VP Richard] Nixon, that he was not a communist," Alarcón says. "In the beginning, Fidel was a charismatic idealist who said he wanted to help the poor. Batista, in hindsight, wasn't so bad after all. He may have been cruelly heavy-handed, but Castro proved to be far worse."

His father left with the family, including young Raúl, traveling to New York City to pick up transmitter tubes for his station thinking it would be a temporary stay until Castro was removed, but never looked back. Not knowing a word of English, he took a job as an on-air DJ at Spanish-speaking WBNX-AM, whose call letters stood for the Bronx, though the offices were located on Fifth Avenue and 46th Street in Manhattan. The elder Alarcón eventually became the station's program director and general manager before starting his own advertising agency catering to the local Hispanic market.

"I grew up with my father coming home from work with a bunch of records under his arm," says Alarcón. "We'd listen to them together into the early hours of the morning. When he first was hired, the station's programming consisted of old trios and guitar groups, romantic balladists from Spain and South America and the old mambo and cha-cha-cha orquestras. He came into it with a very modern brand of radio, the emerging Top 40 format with jingles, promos and artists that didn't get exposure anyplace else."

In 1970, Alarcón's father leased a spoken-word Yiddish station from Jewish news organization the Forward, WEVD-FM — after noted socialist Eugene V. Debs — and relaunched it with a brand-new signal on the Empire State Building as the first Spanish-language music FM outlet. That spot on the dial, 97.9 FM, is now the home of Spanish Broadcasting System's flagship WSKQ-FM, which Raúl Alarcón bought 18 years later and is now Mega 97.9 FM, the nation's No. 1 most-listened-to and most-streamed station in any language.

In 1983, the Alarcóns founded the fledgling Spanish Broadcasting System with the acquisition of WSKQ-AM in New York for $3.25 million. "It was a beautiful music AM station [WVNJ] with the sister FM station eventually becoming Z100," Alarcón says.

With terrestrial radio undergoing a current belt-tightening amid numerous "reductions in force," Alarcón remains bullish on the medium, looking to continued expansion, doubling down by recently selling his TV division and acquiring Florida radio stations in Orlando and Tampa just last year.

"Over the course of four decades, we have had lean years and we have had healthy years," Alarcón says. "But I don't see signs of attrition. What I focus on is, do we have an audience? Are they excited by the music trends we identify? Is our on-air talent creative, relevant and 'sticky'? If all those answers are yes, then other than cyclical macroeconomic issues, I remain extremely bullish on the future of Hispanic radio."

←
Artist Shakira and Raúl Alarcón at the bow of SBS' Los Angeles station Mega 96.3 in 2014.

Shakira/Raul Alarcon: Paul Archuleta/FilmMagic

↑
Hitmaker Marc Anthony and Raúl Alarcón.

Indeed, the current crossover explosion in Latin music — from Bad Bunny and J Balvin to Rosalia, Anitta and Becky G performing in their native tongues — perfectly positions Alarcón's radio empire for the foreseeable future, especially with his company's concert promotion business covering New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago, Puerto Rico and San Francisco as well as its prescient online holdings, which include apps LaMusica.com, acquired in 1999, and talent portal HitzMaker.com. The company also has a syndication arm, AIRE Radio Networks, with a national radio platform of nearly 300 affiliated stations reaching 95% of the U.S. Hispanic audience. The stations' Latin music formats include Tropical, Regional Mexican, Spanish Adult Contemporary, Top 40 and Urbano.

"I was caught by surprise by the explosive popularity of today's Hispanic music," he admits. "Music was something I grew up with, but I never thought it would have the mass appeal, the sustainability and the global acceptance it has now!"

Despite living in polarizing Florida, Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis' backyard, Alarcón remains firmly on the fence politically, though he is well-aware of the importance of the Latino swing vote, which has moved to the right from its formerly Democratic leanings.

"I like to keep my options open," Alarcón says, adding he is not registered with either party and is an "impartial" observer. "The fact that Hispanics are such a large unbeholden constituency makes them a very valuable political force, especially here in Florida, where SBS is in a unique position with the largest footprint in the Spanish-speaking markets. Our stations are diverse and adaptive to the local market. That's always been radio's strength."

Alarcón's impressive resume includes a $435 million IPO back in 1999, still the second-largest such offering in the history of the radio broadcasting industry, that gave him the opportunity to pare down debt and fuel further expansion into Chicago, San Francisco and Puerto Rico, as well as the aforementioned Orlando and Tampa.

SBS continues to be a family affair. Daughter Alessandra, SBS Entertainment president, oversees the concerts and events division, and daughter Bianca manages the digital production at LaMusica.com. His son Andrés is expanding the company into talent development and artist management in the executive suite.

The competitive Alarcón's motivation continues to be winning in every new — and present — market and expanding his digital properties, but he also reiterates "the enormous satisfaction that comes from knowing that every single day, our company touches the lives of millions of Latino listeners, entertaining and informing them while providing a platform for thousands of businesses wanting to reach the nation's fastest-growing consumer — as well as hundreds of our nation's politicians wanting to secure the decisive and elusive Hispanic swing vote. These absolutes remain as true today as they were 40 years ago, only more so ... and growing!" ✓

Timbaland's Sunshine State

Now based in Miami, the "man from the big V.A." has a bevy of new projects on boil, including albums with Justin Timberlake and Missy Elliott • *By Jem Aswad*

It is no understatement to say that Timbaland is one of the most influential and successful songwriter-producers of the last three decades: Justin Timberlake, Missy Elliott, Jay-Z, Rihanna, Madonna, Drake, Bjork and even Chris Cornell are just the best-known of the literally hundreds of artists that Timothy Zachery Mosely has worked with since the Virginia-born, Miami-based hitmaker first popped onto the scene with records by Aaliyah and Ginuwine in the mid-1990s.

His monumentally prolific musical output slowed down to normal speed for a few years while he focused on a multitude of other projects — most prominently "Verzuz," his pandemic-spawned rap/R&B battle series launched with fellow hitmaker Swizz Beatz, which he says has a top-secret announcement coming that will "take us to a whole other level"; and Beat Club, a curated platform for producers and songwriters to sell beats, demos and other song elements to artists, brands and music supervisors.

He will receive the Pioneer Award for his work creating Beat Club and producing music with top artists at *Variety*'s second annual Miami Entertainment Town event taking place in the city April 13.

Beat Club is a two-way street, as it provides an environment for Timbaland to work with young creators — and he's collaborating with tons of them on forthcoming projects, along with new albums from Timberlake and Elliott. In a sprawling chat over Zoom, Timbaland expounded at length upon all of the above and much more.

↑ Miami energizes Timbaland: "It's good to hear so much diversity in music."

Why Miami? What attracts me? It feels like Virginia, it feels like a [major] city, and it feels tropical. It's good to hear so much diversity in music — a little bit more on the Spanish side, but that's cool. Like Will Smith [sings], "Welcome to Miami!"

What's the status of the album you've been recording with Justin Timberlake? We just finished up and everything sounds great. Now it's really on him and when he envisions it to come out, but it's done and it's coming.

What does it sound like? It's fun Justin — it's like [their 2006 blockbuster collaboration] "FutureSex/LoveSounds" but nothing too heavy, just giving you what you expect from us. Music is a young sport — of course, we've both seen a lot of life, but you have to bring out the 13-year-old kid again, you know? We had songs that maybe were too complicated, so we said we want it to feel like "FutureSex" part two, so we did songs that will fit that.

How about Missy? It's been more than 15 years since she released a full album. We've got a lot of songs we're gonna start recording soon, and my dream is to have it out around her birthday in July. I want it to sound how she looks — she looks *incredible* right now. We both look like we 19 again — see? *[Holds phone camera closer to his face.]* Some of it has a kind of Latin feel to it, almost a Bad Bunny effect, some of it's kinda like underground Brazilian funk. People gonna eat it up.

Do you get a lot of new influences coming in from working with people through Beat Club? All day! I am Coach Timbo. I'm in my Quincy Jones phase, where I'm scouting out the best of the best. My thing is to find my LeBrons and build around them: "This is the play, let's go execute." These kids want to prove how great they are, and their ideas generate new ways of doing business. Right after I get off the phone with you, I'm gonna go play a bunch of their new beats.

It's refreshing to hear how energized you are by new sounds and young people, because a lot of successful musicians just do the same thing over and over, and when that happens — You die! You die [creatively], and you don't realize it. When you look at Michael Jackson and Prince, they got lost [later in their careers]. "Why isn't it working anymore?" Because you're not evolving. You have to evolve and accept change.

REVIEWS

Beau Is Afraid

By Peter Debruge

Joaquin Phoenix plays a character overwhelmed by anxiety in “Beau Is Afraid.”

FILM REVIEW

Director: Ari Aster

Starring: Joaquin Phoenix, Patti LuPone, Parker Posey

A24

Poor Beau. Nearly half a century on Earth, and he’s never really lived. Sure, he was born — that much director Ari Aster depicts from Beau’s point of view at the outset of his wildly self-indulgent and frequently surreal third feature, “Beau Is Afraid,” lingering long enough to witness the infant’s umbilical cord being snipped — but what has Beau done with his life since then? Can it be said that he ever really developed an identity apart from his successful single mom, Mona Wasserman, who haunts the film for the better part of three hours before finally revealing herself?

Not since “Psycho” has an off-screen mother loomed so large over a protagonist, played here by Joaquin Phoenix, cowering from the world. The “Psycho” comparison could be misleading, since Aster (who helmed A24’s two most successful horror movies, “Hereditary” and “Midsommar”) makes a surprising tonal shift away from

In flashbacks, Armen Nahapetian plays the young Beau and Zoe Lister-Jones plays his mother.

traditional nightmare material for this deranged picaresque, which follows Beau cross-country — and through several substitute families — to face his intimidating Jewish mom.

Aster's signature slow-building sense of dread pervades a film that can be outrageously violent, although the fear advertised by its title is more satirical than scary, as the cult-fave filmmaker pokes fun at a hapless man-child crippled by guilt, shame and other neuroses.

After showing baby Beau's delivery, Aster skips forward four dozen years to find the mama's boy in psychoanalysis, where character actor Stephen McKinley Henderson makes as convivial a therapist as one could hope to confide in.

Beau has enormous trouble managing his anxiety, which is understandable, since Aster depicts his terrifying inner-city neighborhood as a Hieronymus Bosch-like hellscape, the way Swedish director Roy Andersson might have filmed it: Everyone looks threatening, from the kids with firearms to the face-tattooed creep who chases Beau to his front door. The simple act of crossing the street becomes an almost superhuman challenge, and in the time it takes to do so, all the freaks Beau tried to avoid outside march zombielike up to his apartment, where they tear the place apart.

Had the day gone as planned, Beau would be on a plane to Florida to see his mother. (That's Broadway legend Patti LuPone's voice we hear on the other end of the phone.) But Beau has a way of self-sabotaging, which becomes a running joke in a movie that inflicts the trials of Job on a character who starts out from a far less stable place. Beau has no children or fortune, so the setbacks don't resemble a test of faith so much as the whims of some cruel god — in this case, the director — punishing his creation for our amusement.

Horror and comedy are flip sides of the same coin, confronting taboos en route to catharsis, and detail-oriented Aster seems uniquely wired to meld the two disciplines. From Grace and Roger (Amy Ryan and Nathan Lane), the disconcertingly cheery couple who "adopt" Beau after hitting him with their truck, to the motley commune of so-called Orphans of the Forest who rescue him on the run, Aster's ideas can be quite funny, as he tiptoes the line between relatable and random. Still, three hours doesn't feel at all reasonable for such an uneven collection of sketches.

Strategically parked about halfway through is a terrific stop-motion fantasy sequence, which blossoms out of an immersive stage play Beau watches his new-found forest "family" perform. The show speaks directly to him, suggesting a more fulfilling course that his life could take: meeting a woman, falling in love and raising three sons, before disaster and misunderstanding put him on the run for years. This archetypal digression has the magical effect of making the film seem much more epic than it is, clearing the way for the last (and least successful) hour.

It takes an awfully long time for Aster to reveal the source of the mommy issues that we detect but can't comprehend from the get-go. Deprived of these flashbacks (in which the great Zoe Lister-Jones plays Mona , with Armen Nahapetian as her teenage son), what are we to assume Beau wants from life? Phoenix plays the character as a slump-shouldered and spineless loser, and though one could hardly hope for a more committed performance, the casting feels the most predictable in an ensemble of unconventional choices.

Early on, Aster introduces a childhood sweetheart named Pearl for whom Beau has been saving himself all this time, so audiences anticipate — or at least hope to see — a reunion with her later. It's a treat when erstwhile indie princess Parker Posey shows up in the role, although Aster substitutes sadism for romance in their meet-up, abusing both characters to the strains of Mariah Carey's "Always Be My Baby." And then there's the Patti LuPone version of Mona, who manages to punish Beau from beyond the grave.

By this point, Beau's anxieties have so overwhelmed reality that Aster's sick stunt of a last scene falls flat, set in a badly rendered arena where all the traumas Beau has endured over his life are reframed from Mona's point of view. In "Beau Is Afraid," Aster tracks his titular antihero from birth to death, from psychoanalysis to this cheeky subversion of Freud, where the child assumes responsibility for his parents' trauma, rather than the other way around. But he's crammed so many ideas into this unwieldy container, the film capsizes. In retrospect, "Hereditary" did too, but we forgave it because its finale was frightening, at least. Here, wrapping with an anticlimax seems to be Aster's idea of a joke.

CREDITS: An A24 release and presentation, in association with Access Entertainment, IPR.VC, of an A24 Square Peg production. **Producers:** Lars Knudsen, Ari Aster. **Executive producers:** Len Blavatnik, Danny Cohen, Timo Argillander, Elisa Alvares, Ann Ruark. **Co-producers:** Luca Borghese, Tyler Campellone. **Director, writer:** Ari Aster. **Camera:** Pawel Pogorzelski. **Editor:** Lucian Johnston. **Music:** Bobby Krlic. **Animation:** Cristóbal León, Joaquín Cociña. Reviewed at Alamo Drafthouse Cinema Downtown Los Angeles, Los Angeles, April 1, 2023. MPA Rating: R. **Running time:** 179 MIN. **Cast:** Joaquin Phoenix, Patti LuPone, Amy Ryan, Nathan Lane, Kylie Rogers, Denis Ménochet, Parker Posey, Zoe Lister-Jones, Armen Nahapetian, Julia Antonelli, Stephen McKinley Henderson, Richard Kind, Hayley Squires

A24

Beef

By Alison Herman

Steven Yeun and Ali Wong are drivers caught up in a road rage incident in the Netflix dramedy.

Beef: Netflix (2)

TV REVIEW

Dramedy: Netflix (10 episodes; all reviewed); April 6

Cast: Steven Yeun, Ali Wong, Joseph Lee, Young Mazino

We abhor most in others what we hate in ourselves. So it is that Amy Lau (Ali Wong) and Danny Cho (Steven Yeun) become enemies despite being kindred spirits. The protagonists of the Netflix half-hour "Beef" first meet when both are behind the wheel, navigating the parking lot of a home improvement store. Each driver is there for different reasons: Danny is a handyman who works at the motel his family used to own; Amy owns a houseplant boutique the hardware chain is in talks to acquire. But the two react in the same way to a minor spat over exiting a spot. Their explosive road rage propels the pair on a chase across the suburbs, then through 10 episodes of emotional warfare.

Wong and Yeun have served as co-stars before — on the animated sitcom "Tuca & Bertie," on which "Beef" creator Lee Sung Jin also worked as a writer. Live action allows the actors to occupy the same physical space, where they forge a chemistry that anchors "Beef" through its wild tonal swings. The structure of the show keeps Amy and Danny in separate spheres, enhancing the impact the few times they meet face to face. Their banter has a biting ferocity, rooted in a dispute that gives the characters room to let out the anger and frustration they otherwise repress. No wonder they can't seem to let it go.

"Beef" marks a departure for both its lead performers. Since his days on "The Walking Dead," Yeun has evolved into a modern movie star. "Beef" marks his return to television, and a break from the chilly confidence of Ben, the antagonist in "Burning," or "Nope's" Jupe, who hides his trauma under a huckster's bravado. Danny is an earnest striver, like "Minari's" Jacob, but he lacks the resolve required to muscle one's way to the American dream. He's a beta male, trapped in the shadow of his parents, who expect he'll pay their way back from South Korea, and of his cousin Isaac (the artist David Choe), whose shady dealings are the reason the Chos lost the motel in the first place. Yeun is a heartthrob in real life, yet believable in "Beef" as one of life's losers.

For Wong, "Beef" is more a change of medium than material. Leading a prestige series is new for the comedian, but Amy bears a striking resemblance to the persona Wong presents in her stand-up. Like Wong, Amy is a working mother who's still getting used to outearning her husband. In light of Wong's recent real-life divorce, the parallels are bound to inspire speculation. Whatever their source, though, Amy's rage and insecurity are deeply felt. Wong's comedy is loud and raunchy, and she channels some of that into Amy. But "Beef" allows her to explore similar ideas more quietly and in close-up.

As the series progresses, it spirals further out from its more grounded emotional concerns. As Amy's husband, George, Joseph Lee is note-perfect as a naive dope who, while interested in understanding the abyss where his wife's sense of self should be, just isn't able to. But Amy's new boss Jordan (Maria Bello) and nosy neighbor Naomi (Ashley Park) are caricatures out of another show. Choe starts off as effective typecasting; where Yeun transforms, his co-star barely mediates the abrasive personality shown in projects like "The Choe Show." Yet as the action escalates, Choe gets dragged out of his comfort zone.

"Beef" announces its ambition early, naming episodes after quotes by Franz Kafka and Carl Jung. Some elements, like wry humor, work to offset such self-seriousness. Others, like cartoonish violence or bouts of the surreal, distract from the show's insights. Amy and Danny may differ in gender, class and career path, but they share a self-destructive nihilism that each seems to recognize in the other. When "Beef" keeps its focus on these characters, it does right by the performers at its heart.

CREDITS: Executive producers: Lee Sun Jin, Steven Yeun, Ali Wong, Jake Schreier. 30 MIN. **Cast:** Steven Yeun, Ali Wong, Joseph Lee, Young Mazino, David Choe, Patti Yasutake, Maria Bello, Ashley Park

Brandon Scott Jones

> “When you’re young and doing theater, in your brain you’re essentially on Broadway.”

By Jenelle Riley

Chris Ryan Ross/Paramount

Things you didn’t know about Brandon Scott Jones

←

Age: 38

Hometown: Bel Air, Md.

The write stuff: Screenwriting credits include the Rebel Wilson film “Senior Year” and the TV pilot “The Demons of Dorian Gunn”

Dramaturg: As president of his high school drama club, he was in such productions as “Footloose,” “Getting Away With Murder,” and “All My Sons,” the last of which he calls “an odd choice for a high school to do. And we paired it with ‘Annie.’”

Brandon Scott Jones loves horror films. But the actor and writer, who stars in the CBS series “Ghosts” as forgotten Revolutionary War soldier Capt. Isaac Higgintoot, has yet to appear in the horror genre. That all changes with the April 14 release of “Renfield,” starring Nicolas Cage as Dracula and Nicholas Hoult as his put-upon underling. Jones plays Mark, the leader of a co-dependency support group who advises Renfield — with no idea just how toxic his relationship with the vampire truly is. Jones will also be seen in the third season of “The Other Two,” hitting HBO Max on May 4, reprising his role as Curtis, the confidant to aspiring actor Cary (Drew Tarver).

● **“Renfield” is so great, but it’s not easy to describe. Did you know it was something special when you first read it?** Well, you always hope. But I remember reading page one and going, “I love this. This is exactly the type of movie I would want to see.” And when we were shooting, it felt like we had something wild. We shot practical nights, even on interiors, so we were on vampire hours, which I think helped the mentality a little bit. But it was really, really fun and felt special and cool.

● **How did you go about booking the role?** It was a pretty straightforward process: I self-taped, and Rebecca Wisocky, who plays Hetty on “Ghosts,” was my reader, because I did it after a long day on set. In fact, I think I still had a little Isaac makeup on.

● **Wait, did Rebecca play Dracula?** She did! And I should go back and find that audition because she did such a good job. She was so committed! If you’re going to have anybody as your reader, Rebecca Wisocky is the one you want. I would not be surprised to find out I got that part largely due to her.

● **Did Nicolas Cage stay in character as Dracula between takes?** Not necessarily, but I think he was in, like, the vibe of the character. I got the sense that he really lives in the feeling of a character and keeps moving and talking like him. It was a really cool work ethic that I found infectious.

● **You’ve had so much success as both an actor and a writer. Did they always go hand in hand, or did you start out in one direction?** When I was in about the seventh grade, I saw “Good Will Hunting.” My dad told me Ben Affleck and Matt Damon wrote the movie. I didn’t know you could do that. So I asked my mom to take me to Barnes & Noble and got a book on screenwriting — “The Elements of Screenwriting.” And I wrote my first full screenplay with the idea I would act in it. At the same time, I was doing theater in high school and knew I wanted to follow that.

The two paths really converged for me at the Upright Citizens Brigade in New York, where I studied and performed a lot. They really teach you to celebrate your own voice and those around you and write for yourself and for others. It’s a really fun way to combine the two, and I am very, very grateful both have worked out for me.

● **Was high school theater a big part of your life?** Oh, God, yes. I became the president of my drama club, and I took it so seriously — like I would put it on my résumé to this day. When you’re young and doing theater, in your brain you’re essentially on Broadway. I mean, I would call The New York Times to see if they wanted to come down and review our show. I was truly so into it. I wanted to sell season tickets. I tried to advertise in The Baltimore Sun. I remember asking, “Are we eligible for the Helen Hayes Award?”

Variety, VOL. 359, NO. 13 (USPS 146-820, ISSN 0011-5509) is published weekly, except the last week of June, the first week of July and the last week of December, with 8 special issues: Jan. (5) and Feb. (3) by Variety Media LLC, 11175 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90025, a division of Penske Business Media. Periodicals postage paid at Los Angeles, CA and at other mailing offices. Postmaster send address changes to: Variety, P.O. Box 15759, North Hollywood, CA 91615-5759. Canada Post International Publications Mail Product (Canadian Distribution) Publications Mail Agreement No. 40043404. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: RCS International Box 697 STN A, Windsor, Ontario N9A 6N4. Sales agreement No. 0607525.
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